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January 31, 2023

The Honorable Ken Weyler, Chairman
Fiscal Committee of the General Court
State House
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

His Excellency, Governor Christopher T. Sununu
and the Honorable Council
State House
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

REQUESTED ACTION

Pursuant to RSA 14:30-a VI, authorize the Department of Justice (DOJ) to accept and expend federal funds in the amount of $5,000,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) State Fiscal Recovery Funds (SFRF) for the purpose of subgranting funds to existing subgrantees to address the increased need for victim services upon the approvals of the Fiscal Committee of the General Court and Governor and Executive Council through June 30, 2023. This is an allowable use of ARPA SFRF funds under Section 602 (c)(1)(A) to respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts. 100% Federal Funds.

Funds are to be budgeted in account #02-20-20-201510-2479-ARPA VOCA as follows:

Class & Object	Class Title	FY 2023 Current Budget	Requested Action	FY 2023 Revised Budget
040-501587	Indirect Costs	$38,884	$60,000	$98,884
041-500801	Audit Fund Set Aside	$0	$5,000	$5,000
072-500574	Grants-Federal	$4,961,116	$4,885,000	$9,846,116
085-588510	Interagency Tranfs Out of Fed Funds	$0	$50,000	$50,000
	Total:	$5,000,000	$5,000,000	$10,000,000
Source of Funds				
000-400338-16	Federal Funds	$5,000,000	$5,000,000	$10,000,000

[1] All direct program costs will be accounted for using activity 00FRF602PH2001A and all administrative and indirect costs will be accounted for using activity 00FRF602PH2001Z. Accounting classifications may be subject to technical changes at the discretion of the Department of Administrative Services' Division of Accounting Services.

EXPLANATION

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is requesting to accept and expend funds from the Federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), State Fiscal Recovery Funds (SFRF) for purpose of subgranting funds to existing subgrantees to address the increased need for victim services.

Federal award funds, for this item, are budgeted to support grant activities as follows:
040-501587-Indirect Costs-Administration Costs.
041-500801-Audit Fund Set Aside at 0.1%.
072-500575-Grants to direct service providers to victims of crime.
085-588510-Grants to state agencies.

The DOJ subgrants funds, for direct victim services, from the Victims of Crime Act Grant (VOCA). VOCA was enacted by Congress in 1984 and it established the Crime Victims Fund. Fines paid by offenders of federal crimes are deposited into this Fund. Money from the Fund is then distributed to states for the benefit of victims of crime. Due to reduced criminal fines and penalty deposits into the fund and non-prosecution agreements that divert funds for other purposes, VOCA awards have been reduced dramatically resulting in decreased subgrants to victim service providers.

This reduction has come at a time when victim service providers are experiencing an increase in need. In New Hampshire, for calendar year 2022, calls to domestic violence and sexual assault crisis lines increased by approximately 63% and emergency shelters, for domestic violence victims, increased by approximately 30% compared to 2019. The pandemic brought new sets of challenges for victims, who were exposed to more severe cases of violence and abuse, to access services and support.

Despite relaxed COVID-19 restrictions, there are indications that the need for victim services will continue to increase. Mandated social isolation, compounded with the fear of getting sick, instantly provided new ways for abusive partners to leverage power and control. Additionally, job loss and financial instability has augmented the impact of economic abuse, which further makes it difficult for survivors to access resources. As COVID-19 has had a severe impact on mental health and substance misuse in our communities, it is important to continue to provide mental health and wellness services. This is especially important for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, who have a higher vulnerability to homelessness, substance abuse, and poverty compared to the general population who have never experienced abuse.[1]

[1] Supporting the Most Vulnerable; The New Hampshire Coalition on Domestic and Sexual Violence

During the pandemic, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) saw a drastic drop in reports of child abuse and neglect suspicions. During this same time, New Hampshire saw a significant drop in Child Advocacy Center (CAC) referrals from law enforcement and DCYF. It is believed this was directly related to limited personal interactions between children and adults who would most likely report concerns (teachers, medical/mental health providers and other professionals working with youths).

In 2020, all 11 of New Hampshire's CACs remained open to serve the needs of child victims of abuse and their caregivers. The CACs experienced a 66% increase in referrals for forensic interviews from April through June 2020. There was also a 28% increase in interviews for June 2020 as compared to June 2019[2]. CASA of NH has seen a surge in the number of post-pandemic cases that require a child advocate. In addition, backlogged court cases plus new cases have resulted in more victims in need of services.

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt across the various victim services organizations that receive VOCA funds. The New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (NHCADSV), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Granite State Children's Alliance (GSCA) and New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) all report that the lingering effects of financial hardships related to the pandemic are the driving force in additional services rendered to victims in their respective organizations. Financial stresses are known contributors to higher instances of domestic violence, child abuse, and substance use disorders. Additionally, not all services are at full capacity as they were before the pandemic began. And this is creating a backlog of services to victims, which will take a considerable amount of time to clear in the years ahead.

In the event that Federal Funds become no longer available, General Funds will not be requested to support this program.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Formella
Attorney General

#3853374

[2] Annual Impact Report 2020, Granite State Children's Alliance