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Criminal Victim Assistance program gets \$63,035 grant

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By Rich Suwanski, Messenger-Inquirer

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The Office of Criminal Victim Assistance in Daviess County received a \$63,035 grant last week to hire an attorney to help with domestic violence prosecution.

The grant was part of \$1.6 million in federal stimulus funds that Gov. Steve Beshear released for 22 state programs to support victims of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and sexual assault.

Recipients include domestic violence shelters, law enforcement, prosecution, statewide coalitions providing training and technical assistance to diverse recipients, and other complementary service providers.

"Two years ago, the (Daviess County) Sheriff's Department, the (Owensboro) Police Department and OASIS applied for a much larger grant to get some photographic equipment and a computerized system to help collect evidence and coordinate all those things, but that fell through," said Daviess County Attorney Claude Porter.

"But we realized we could use somebody who could devote their time to that. There's a difference in the victims of domestic violence. They're reluctant to prosecute defendants because they have a close relationship with that person.

"With this grant, we think we can convince victims to prosecute, and remind the defendants that there are limits to the things you can do to the people you love."

Marilyn Duncan, victim advocate in the Criminal Victim Assistance office, said domestic violence is a big problem.

"The most-common reason victims are reluctant to prosecute is fear of retaliation from him," she said. "She may feel dependent on him. He may have convinced her that she can't get along without him. And she may still be in love with him."

Porter said the candidate for the new position should have experience with the court and prosecution system, be sympathetic and empathetic, as well as be patient and firm.

"Sometimes, victims are more willing than they should be to enter into agreements that they shouldn't enter into," he said. "Because of the nature of District Court and the things we have to deal with, a lot of our prosecutors don't have a lot of time, and we think domestic violence victims need a little more personal attention than we've been able to give them."

A \$170,000 project slated for the Louisville Metro Criminal Justice Commission is for an electronic communications system to review and approve domestic violence and emergency protection orders. The system, to be piloted in Jefferson County with the potential to be expanded statewide, will speed up the approval of the orders, which under the current system can take hours or even days to execute.

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