



## RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE SERVICES

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CRIME VICTIM ADVOCATE PROGRAM | JUST RESPONSE | PREVENTION DIVISION | RURAL PROGRAMS

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May 12, 2020

To: Law and Order Interim Committee  
From: Missoula City-County Department of Relationship Violence Services  
Re: Montana Board of Crime Control

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Missoula City-County Relationship Violence Services appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC).

Relationship Violence Services—established in 1985 as the Crime Victim Advocate Program—is one of the oldest legal advocacy programs in Montana. Our program provides free and confidential assistance to victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other violent crimes. Our program offers victim advocacy, assistance in obtaining orders of protection, crisis counseling, and support; provides information and referrals to community-based services; and, upholds victims' rights within the criminal justice system to all people who have been the victim of crime within Missoula County. Within the criminal justice system, advocates are in the role to solely focus on the victim/survivor and provide services focused on their wellbeing and safety. In some cases, victims seek services even if they do not report the crime to law enforcement. Further, many cases that are reported and investigated are declined for prosecution. Advocates remain involved with victims of crime regardless of the status of the case.

Relationship Violence Services received its first VOCA grant the same year that we were established. It cannot be overstated how important these funds are to our program's ability to serve victims of crime—specifically focusing on domestic and sexual violence and stalking. VOCA funds are the program's primary support for crime victim advocate positions within the Crime Victim Advocate Program. The VAWA grant is Missoula County's most stable and critical source of funding for facilitating a coordinated criminal justice system response to domestic and sexual violence and stalking through a multidisciplinary team approach, the provision of across-the-system training ensuring best practices are embedded in each agency's response, the coordination of several specialized programs, and the ability to address complex cross-cutting issues in a timely, strategic, and effective manner. These program elements make up the full-time work plan of the Just Response Coordinator.

Funding from the MBCC sustainably supports the majority of victim services and justice system specialized training and response work in Missoula County. **This funding is the primary source of funds for victims services in the state and is critical to our ability to meet the needs of victims of domestic and sexual violence and other crimes.** (The state does not provide general-fund dollars to support these



*Ending relationship violence. Creating solutions for a healthy community.*

programs, local governments and court fines can only sustain a portion of the needed services. While federal and foundation grants exist, they are highly competitive and don't often prioritize small, rural programs. Additionally, these funds are subject to rules that can be challenging to comply with for small programs with few staff members.) **Without funding from the Montana Board of Crime Control, many victim services programs across the state would not exist.**

Missoula County and the Montana Board of Crime Control have a long history of partnership and collaboration. With MBCC funding the program has provided continuous services to victims of crime for over thirty-five years. In 2019 we served victims in 1,800 cases. Additionally, our program has provided training locally and across the state with these funds. Historically the board has been a trusted and reliable partner in serving victims of crime. However, in the last couple of years this partnership has been strained. Beginning in 2017 the MBCC began expanding funding to programs that do not provide core crime victims services, but rather obliquely serve crime victims—in that crime victims also access their programs, just like non-crime victims would. This has resulted in there being fewer dollars for core services and has pitted core victim services programs against other important programs in a competition for funds. (While these programs are important, such as The Boys and Girls Club, VOCA funds are not the appropriate funding source for them if it diminished existing, core services.) Along the way, the MBCC also began considering new funding formulas to try to fund the expanding pool of programs. These formulas have never been published for grantees to consider and appeared to be arbitrary. These two issues came to a head in last year's funding cycle.

Last year the MBCC was facing tough decisions as they had more applications than they could fund. At one stage of their decision making process, Relationship Violence Services was facing a fifty-percent cut in funding *simply because of the total dollar amount of our application*. The proposed cut did not take into consideration that the program provides core victim services, has been a long-time successful program with a history of partnership and collaboration, the size of the community that we serve, nor the fact that our grant application was the highest ranked in that cycle. This cut in funding would have been devastating. Missoula should not face losing several victim advocates while other programs that do not provide core services are funded. This year our program is facing a similar arbitrary funding formula under the VAWA grant. Programs are facing a twenty-five percent cut based on requested funding. If a program was prudent enough to ask for additional funding, they will be well served with this formula. However, if a program sought the same level of support as the previous year, they will experience a funding cut that is not based on any other factor than how much they applied for. Grantees need to know from the time that the request for proposal comes out how many programs the MBCC anticipates funding and what sort of funding formula will be used to evaluate the allocation of those dollars so that grantees can compete successfully.

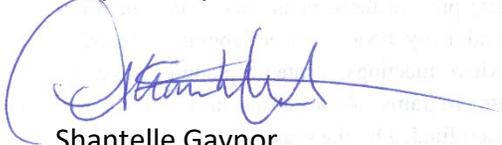
The Montana Board of Crime Control is a critical partner in ensuring that victims of crimes receive the services that they need. Core victim services, including advocacy, accompaniment in reporting to law enforcement, information about their rights, and linkages to life lines, such as safe housing, are primarily supported through VOCA and VAWA funds administered by the MBCC in the state of Montana. The MBCC's ability to support critical victim services programs will not be strengthened with another administrative move—rather that may create renewed disruption and confusion. Programs need consistency and predictability to continue to seamlessly meet our missions of providing services to victims of crime. Programs will be best served if we focus on board

stabilization and functioning. This will lead to better results. The board's important role of being the primary funder of victim services across the state would be strengthened by the following:

- Legislation is needed that prioritizes funds for traditional victim service programs. The dollars distributed by Montana Board of Crime Control are the lifeblood of victim service programs across the state. The decisions of the board have huge impacts on these programs which will only get more difficult over the next few years as the federal dollars shrink.
- Create a permanent seat on the Montana Board of Crime Control designated to be filled by a traditional victims advocate services provider. Current decisions are not informed by the needs of the field of victim services providers. A representative of the field is important to ensuring that the board understands the needs of the organizations that it funds.
- Increase the transparency of the MBCC decision making process by requiring that board meetings are subject to Montana's open meeting requirements including properly noticed meetings, ensuring access to meetings both in person and through technology, and that meeting materials are available for review, and that minutes are published and accessible to the public.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Shantelle Gaynor

Director

Missoula City-County Department of Relationship Violence Services