

FFY 2024 VAWA STOP Grant Application

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety & Security Guidelines for Specialized Domestic Violence Civilian Advocates in Police Departments To be on file at Police Department (if Applicable)

A. EMPLOYMENT CRITERIA:

1. **Education:** *Minimum* of an Associate's Degree preferred. May be replaced by relevant work or volunteer experience, preferably a *minimum of one year* with a victim service program such as:
 - Battered women/rape crisis programs (Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault programs)
 - Certified batterer intervention programs
 - Victim witness assistance programs (District Attorney's offices or a post-conviction agency)
 - Other local victim service programs which specialize in rape crisis or domestic violence services
2. **Hiring Process:** Open posting with notices to victim service programs (see above list).
3. **Language/Cultural Background:** Advocate must possess strong communication skills (both written and oral). When appropriate, preference will be given to candidates who are bilingual/bicultural (reflective of population served).

B. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

1. It is imperative that civilian advocates within Police Departments be **well trained** in domestic violence/sexual assault issues particularly as they pertain to victims. Advocates must receive training (either before or after hire) by:
 - A newly funded VAWA Civilian Advocate in Police Department Training;
 - A certified SAFEPLAN Program;
 - A certified Department of Public Health Batterer Intervention Program;
 - A qualified Domestic Violence Victims service program;
 - Department of Social Services Domestic Violence Specialist Training;
 - Other training authorized in advance by the VAWA STOP Grant office; or
 - **Police departments are required to send a minimum of one veteran officer to a Domestic Violence or Sexual Assault specialized training sponsored by the Municipal Police Training Committee on an annual basis.**
2. Each Advocate must receive **orientation** to the department's organization and operation.
3. Opportunities must be provided to the Advocate to receive additional **annual on-going training**¹ (i.e., through District Attorney's Office, Dangerousness Assessment, High Risk Response Team Development, Office of the Attorney General, conferences, or SAFEPLAN).

C. SUPERVISION: Each Police Department hosting or hiring a civilian domestic violence/sexual assault advocate must designate an officer within that department to supervise the advocate.

- **The Supervisor's name** must be included in the grant application, including a description of the supervisor's background and training in domestic violence. Whenever possible, supervision should be provided by the department's specialized domestic violence officer.

¹ Funding for such trainings may be requested within VAWA grant application, or can be part of department's matching contribution.

- **Regularly scheduled technical assistance** must be provided for the advocate from a local domestic violence/sexual assault program.

D. JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: To assist police departments by providing emotional and support services to victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and stalking. Appropriate assistance to victims includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Short-term victim support and crisis intervention;
- Safety planning and risk assessment;
- Referrals to community services;
- Education: dynamics of abuse 209A rights and options;
- Follow-up with victim;
- Liaison between victim and police to facilitate communication;
- Facilitate court appearance by victim; and
- Conducting continual assessment of department's performance by surveying (e.g. telephone or mail survey) victim regarding their experience with the department.

Note: Record keeping should be minimal considering limits on confidentiality, especially as it relates to discoverable records.

E. JOB DESCRIPTION: A detailed description of the advocate's role must be included in the grant application, including a detailed work schedule (e.g., number of hours per week and on-call responsibilities).

- If the job description includes "ride-alongs" or home visits, details of the safety guidelines must be submitted in the application.
- If twenty-four hour coverage is desired, the purpose of and need for the on-call service should be identified and reasonable shifts should be established. (Need for this coverage **must be beyond** the twenty-four hour services currently provided by domestic violence/sexual assault programs). The need, purpose, and shifts must be included in the application.
- A single advocate should not be expected to provide twenty-four hour "on call" coverage.

F. THE ROLE OF THE ADVOCATE *DOES NOT* INCLUDE:

- Gathering or handling evidence;
- Conducting investigative interviews;
- Taking photographs of victim, injuries, or scene; or
- Baby-sitting victim's children;
- Although data entry is likely to be part of the role, VAWA funds are not to hire civilians who will strictly do data entry of 209A orders or other unrelated data entry;
- Going to the scene or staying alone with the victim is not recommended.

G. SAFETY: The Advocate's safety *is paramount* and must *never* be compromised.

Transportation: Due to the fact that an advocate's vehicle and license plates can be easily recognized (particularly in smaller towns) *advocates should not be required to* nor is it recommended that they use their own vehicles to travel to the victim's home or to transport victims.

- Where available, transportation should be provided by a cruiser or by cab (funds for vouchers may be sought through the grant).
- Community Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault programs and the District Attorney's victim-advocates may be able to provide assistance with transportation.

H. HOME VISITS: An advocate should not be sent to a victim's home. **However, if the department is seeking such a role, the department must include specific safety guidelines with the grant application.** The following minimal precautions must be taken:

- The Advocate must be accompanied by a police officer;
- A radio or cellular phone for the victim advocate must be supplied in order to contact the department immediately in the event of an emergency (do not rely on victim's home phone);

- Home visits *should not* occur unless the suspect is in police custody (however, caution is still warranted, because others familiar to the suspect can still pose a significant risk to the victim and advocate); and
- Advocates *should not* use a personal vehicle to respond to the victim's residence.

I. CONFIDENTIALITY:

- **If the advocate is an employee of the police department,** the advocate's communications with the victim have no greater confidentiality than a police officer's communication. This needs to be clearly conveyed to the victim.
- **If the advocate is an employee of a Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Program,** the advocate's communications **MAY** have a higher degree of protection if they qualify under MGL, Ch. 233, § 20K.

J. REGIONAL COLLABORATION: A significant goal of VAWA funds is to encourage collaboration among different victim service providers, law enforcement agencies, district attorney offices, and community based partners. **Therefore, it is highly recommended that the police department form a collaborative relationship with the local domestic violence/sexual assault program to hire an advocate and participate in local domestic violence roundtables or meetings of such nature.**

A SIGNED MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT with the local domestic violence/sexual assault program must be provided with the application. If the civilian advocate to be hired is not an employee of the program, additional details *must be* addressed in the MOA, to include the role of the program in providing technical assistance to the advocate, and the guidelines for making referrals. The MOA must also outline the role for the police department's advocate in relation to the advocates from the domestic violence program and the District Attorney's Office.