

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 28, 2014

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 

FROM: NELSIE L. SMITH, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #15: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FAMILY SERVICES SPECIALIST

This memorandum responds to questions from Councilmembers Lovain and Wilson related to the Alexandria Police Department's Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist, which was proposed for elimination in the FY 2015 proposed budget.

What is the volume of non-arrest domestic violence cases during FY 2014?

The Police Department collects and reports crime data by calendar year. The most recent calendar year data available is 2013 in which there were 299 non-arrest domestic violence cases.

What follow-up and social work has occurred with the victims in those cases? What is the timeliness of the follow-up activities that have occurred?

The Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist is responsible for providing the following victim service functions: reviewing and entering non-arrest police report information into the court database for automatic DCHS referral; providing crisis intervention and case management to DV victims of non-arrest cases; and providing case management and legal advocacy on DV stalking cases. The position's review of non-arrest cases and follow-up lethality assessment also serves as an investigative function for APD; this function is often performed by a sergeant.

Since this position has been vacant, victim assistance follow-up in non-arrest cases has relied primarily on patrol officers following APD Directive 11.07 (Domestic Violence), which directs officers to call the DCHS Domestic Violence Program before leaving the scene regardless of whether a formal arrest is made. This referral process, which predates the Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist vacancy, is vital for connecting victims to DCHS to receive support including counseling, shelter, legal advocacy, and other services. It is important to note that some victims in non-arrest domestic violence cases already have a relationship with the DCHS Domestic Violence Program.

Investigative follow-up in non-arrest domestic violence cases and stalking cases has not occurred since this position became vacant. APD lacks capacity to review original police reports for

accuracy or identification of undetected evidence that would evolve non-arrest cases into arrest cases. Additionally, there is no direct assistance to victims in obtaining protective orders, which can be cumbersome and complicated to the victim.

Which organizations perform that work today? Are there opportunities within other departments (Commonwealth's Attorney's office, DCHS, etc.) to divide the follow-up activities and ensure their completion in a timely manner?

The Domestic Violence Family Support Specialist provides the following victim support and investigative follow-up in non-arrest domestic violence cases, and victim support in domestic violence stalking cases.

Non-arrest domestic violence cases (299 cases in 2013):

- Reading each non-arrest report submitted by patrol officers to ascertain why a warrant was not issued
- Entering police report information into the court's database to generate a referral to the Domestic Violence Program
- Conducting a thorough lethality assessment to determine if further police investigation is needed (e.g., evidence of bruises, any injuries requiring medical attention, etc.)
- Providing safety planning and other victim services to individuals who requested further involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g., applying for protective orders and other civil court remedies)
- Determining whether children were present in the home and if a referral to Child Protective Services (CPS) is needed
- Collaborating with Domestic Violence Unit Detectives, Community Policing officers, partner agencies and other systems
- Contacting victims, including phone calls and home visits with an accompanying officer or detective (for the safety of the non-sworn position).
- Encouraging victims to utilize DVP counseling services and referring them to one of the program's outreach social workers for individual counseling or support group

Domestic violence stalking cases (~five cases each month):

- Responding to General District Court when a victim showed up for a protective order
- Meeting with the stalking victim and the detective to work on gathering evidence and provide intensive safety planning (these cases have the most potential to be lethal)
- Providing regular follow-up/case management
- Attending multiple court hearings

The functions performed by the Domestic Violence Family Support Specialist fall under the purview of other City agencies, but are not currently being offered for these particular subsets of victims/cases. The DCHS Domestic Violence Program provides victim assistance in both arrest and non-arrest cases of domestic violence. The Commonwealth Attorney's Victim Witness Assistance services program provides follow-up and assistance to victims in arrest cases; they also enter arrest report information to generate a referral to DCHS. APD detectives provide investigative follow-up on arrest cases involving domestic violence to ensure successful

prosecution. No department or position is currently providing intensive case management services to victims of intimate partner violence stalking.

Why wasn't the position filled when it became vacant last year?

Various factors contributed to the delay in filling the Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist. During summer 2013, an AlexStat review of City-wide domestic violence program was initiated. A primary objective of this review was to evaluate the need for the Family Services Specialist position and determine whether domestic violence services could be delivered more efficiently and effectively. In anticipation of the final recommendations of this study, the Police Department delayed moving forward with the hiring process.

Additionally, APD began preliminary FY15 budget discussions in fall 2013 and anticipated that significant budget reduction proposals would be required. It was determined that this position would likely be considered for reduction in the upcoming budget process. This position was proposed for reduction in the FY15 Proposed budget. These factors, combined with competing workload priorities within the Police Department, contributed to the delay in completing the hiring process for the Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist. At this time, the hiring process has been frozen, pending City Council's passage of the FY15 Approved budget.

Isn't it true that the position serves a unique role; helping to PREVENT domestic abuse through access to police records and outreach to likely abuse victims before a crime occurs or the victim is desperate enough to seek help?

The Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist position serves a unique role within the domestic violence process and works to prevent future incidents of domestic violence. This position reaches victims in non-arrest cases by phone, home visits, by letter, at the courthouse, schools, and in public establishments. During follow-ups, this position attempts to evolve cases from non-arrest into an "arrest" when possible. The Family Services Specialist photographs newly presenting bruising, and refers cases back to the Sergeant for further detective investigation. This position provides counseling support, information and referral, and connection to outside services to the victim and meets victims at the courthouse to assist them through the entire process of obtaining Preliminary Protective Orders (PPO). The position provides victims with 911 cell phones and "Stalking Sacks" to assist them with staying safe and keeping track of stalking incidents and educates them about evidence collection. All of these services are provided to prevent future acts of domestic violence from occurring.

How many domestic abuse victims were helped in recent years when the position was filled?

There were 407 non-arrest domestic violence cases in CY12 and 370 non-arrest cases in CY11.

Is part of the problem the fact that this position is not part of the core mission of the Police Department? If so, could this position be funded through DCHS without jeopardizing access to police records?

The Domestic Violence Family Services Specialist is a social service function that serves as a valuable asset to the Police Department in providing police services to the community. However, when faced with budget constraints, this position and function had to be assessed in comparison to other core services provided by a police officer or detective.

There are some tasks that the Domestic Violence Program could perform with additional staffing, such as providing intensive safety planning and follow-up case management; attending court hearings; referring cases to Child Protective Services; and assisting individuals in applying for court orders. These functions, however, are a fraction of the overall work provided by the APD Family Services Specialist. In addition, staff located in DCHS would not have independent authority to access police records. Several of the primary functions, such as determining whether the action taken by officers (or magistrates) was appropriate and gathering further evidence, are investigative in nature and are most closely aligned with Alexandria Police Department functions.

Are there other ways this position could be funded, at least on a transitional basis, e.g. grant funding or as a part-time position?

The Police Department conducted research on potential grant opportunities related to domestic violence services, including those funded through the Office of Violence Against Women in the United States Department of Justice, but was unable to identify any at this time. If funded as a part-time position, the level of service provided would be diminished accordingly.