

**Columbus Consolidated Government
Council Meeting Agenda Item**

TO:	Mayor and Councilors
AGENDA SUBJECT:	FY23- FY24 – Solicitor General Crime Victim Assistance Grant
AGENDA SUMMARY:	Request to accept a Federal VOCA (Victims of Crimes Act) Grant in the amount of \$201,950 or as otherwise awarded from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the Solicitor General’s Victim Assistance Program.
INITIATED BY:	Solicitor General’s Victim Witness Assistance Program

Recommendation: Approval is requested to accept a Federal VOCA (Victims of Crimes Act) Grant in the amount of \$201,950 or as otherwise awarded from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council for the Solicitor General’s Victim Assistance Program. Amend the Multi Governmental Fund (0216) to reflect these revenues and expenses.

Background: The Solicitor General’s Victim Assistance program was organized in 1997 to manage misdemeanor crime victims’ needs and services, participate in law enforcement and community training and awareness, coordinate in-office investigation and prosecution, coordinate community intervention and prevention efforts, and maintain necessary documentation to maintain funding.

In 1998, the Solicitor General’s Victim Witness Assistance program obtained a Federal VOCA (Victims of Crimes Act) Grant. The VOCA Grant Program supports direct services to crime victims, I.e., persons who have suffered physical, sexual, financial, or emotional harm as a result of the commission of crime.

Since 1998 , the Solicitor General’s Victim Witness Program has provided direct services to crime victims by: interviewing and photographing victims, making referrals to area assistance agencies, accompanying victims to court, obtaining information to deliver to the court as victim impact statements for sentencing, assisting in filing victim compensation claims and obtaining restitution, tracking probation violations, helping victims obtain protective services and orders, making efforts to insulate victims from defendants’ actions, and explaining the prosecution process to victims and families. The Victim Assistance office aids to approximately 6,900 if not more, crime victims and over 15,883 services in State Court each year.

The VOCA Grant awarded to the Solicitor General’s Victim Witness Assistance Program is administered through the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) and the prosecuting Attorney’s Council of Georgia (PACGA). The grant amount is \$201,950.

This grant funds, in part, the Victim Assistance Judicial Technician II, the Victim Advocate positions and a portion of the Victim Service Director in the Solicitor General’s Victim Witness

Assistance Office. The remaining balance of the salary and benefits of the Judicial Technician II position and benefits of that position are funded from the five percent crime victim surcharge funds –which have been used in years past as the “matching” funds required by the grant.

Analysis: The Solicitor General’s Victims Witness Assistance program has again been awarded a Federal VOCA Grant in the amount of \$201,950 or as otherwise awarded for FY 23/24. City council is requested to accept the grant to continue to fund the positions and meet the requirements of the VOCA Grant. Council has approved the grant and the matching funding from the five percent crime victim surcharge fund for the years. This is a similar request.

Financial Consideration: This office will request disbursement of funds from the five percent crime victim surcharge fund once the need for those funds is determined, the local match requirement of the grant is currently being waived. Grant use requirements generally stipulate that the ‘match’ provided by the grant recipient must include personnel. The grant funds will pay \$201,950 or as otherwise awarded of the salary and benefits of the Victim Assistance Judicial Technician II, the Victim Advocate’s, the Investigator advocate and a portion of the Director of victim service position. The city is reimbursed from the VOCA grant for the \$201,950 in salary for the Victim Assistance Judicial Technician II, the Victim Advocate’s, the Investigator Advocate and portion of the Director of Victim Service position. Non-reimbursed salary is requested from the five percent crime victim assistance surcharge fund. The surcharge fund is specially tagged for funding of victim/witness assistance programs (O.C.G.A. 15-21-132(a)(1)). The Solicitor General’s Office, prosecuting in State Court, is a major source of this five percent crime victim surcharge fund pool. For years, Council has previously approved the grant and use of the five percent crime victim surcharge for this purpose.

Legal Considerations: Georgia law requires that the prosecutor, the Solicitor General, provide extensive services, information and notification to crime victims. (O.C.G.A 17-7-1 et. seq.) The Solicitor General is directly responsible for complying with the law. The Georgia legislature exacted the Victims’ Bill of Rights mandating that the Solicitor General comply with the law.

Additionally, the Georgia Legislature, acknowledging the additional burdens placed on prosecutors, designed laws enabling prosecutors to provide services directly to victims and the Legislature provided a fund from which the prosecutors to provide services directly to victims and the legislature provided a fund from which the prosecutor may draw to fund the costs incurred therefore. (O.C.G.A 15-21-130 et. Seq.) These funds are derived from a five percent penalty assessed on fines ordered in Muscogee County Courts (Crime Victim Surcharge Fund). The amount collected in this fund is substantial.

The governing Authority (City Council) authorizes grant award acceptance, approves the disbursement from the five percent crime victim surcharge fund, and enables the Solicitor General to administer the program in compliance with applicable laws.

Recommendations/Actions: (1) Approve acceptance of the \$201,950 “or as otherwise awarded” Federal VOCA Grant award; and, (2) amend the Multi Government Fund (0216) to reflect these revenues and expenses.

A RESOLUTION

NO.

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE SOLICITOR GENERAL TO ACCEPT A VOCA GRANT AWARD OF \$201,950 OR AS OTHERWISE AWARDED TO OPERATE THE SOLICITOR GENERAL’S VICTIM WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FROM OCTOBER 1, 2022 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2023. AMEND THE MULTI GOVERNMENTAL FUND 0216 BY THE AMOUNT AWARDED.

WHEREAS the Solicitor-General designed a Victim Witness Assistance Program in 1997, which specially address the needs of misdemeanor crime victims; and,

WHEREAS the funds are requested to finance personnel and budget of the Solicitor-General’s Victim Witness Assistance Program to provide services mandated by Georgia Law; and,

WHEREAS the Solicitor-General is requesting the acceptance of a \$201,950 or as otherwise awarded Federal Grant Award for salary and benefits; and,

WHEREAS, if accepted, Federal grant monies will reimburse the City for salary, and benefits for the excluding applicable Federal and State taxes.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF COLUMBUS, GEORGIA HEREBY RESOLVES.

That the City Manager is hereby authorized to accept a Grant funds for the Solicitor General’s Victim/Witness Assistance program from VOCA, a federal grant and amend the Multi Governmental Fund (0216) to reflect the revenue and expenses.

Introduced at a regular Meeting of Council of Columbus, Georgia, held the 24th day of January, 2023, and adopted at said meeting by the affirmative vote of ____ members of said Council.

- Councilor Allen voting _____
- Councilor Barnes voting _____
- Councilor Cogle voting _____
- Councilor Crabb voting _____
- Councilor Davis voting _____
- Councilor Garrett voting _____
- Councilor House voting _____
- Councilor Huff voting _____
- Councilor Thomas voting _____
- Councilor Tucker voting _____

Sandra T. Davis, Clerk of Council

B.H. “Skip” Henderson, Mayor