

The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the support we provide to victims of domestic abuse through the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund.

The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, was created by the Texas Legislature to help victims of violent crime and their families shoulder the burden of expenses they bear as a result of the crime.

The Crime Victims' Compensation program acts as a payer of last resort to cover expenses arising from violent crimes. Last year, my office paid out a record \$72 million to almost 16,000 crime victims.

This program is paid for by people who break the law, at no expense to taxpayers. The Fund's money comes from fees, court costs and restitution paid by those convicted of a felony or misdemeanor in a state court.

Some of the benefits are of particular value in cases of family violence. For example, some funds are available to help pay the cost of

relocation when a domestic abuse victim is trying to move away from the abuser. Help with relocation costs is also available to those who have been sexually assaulted in their homes.

Other expenses covered by the program include out-of-pocket medical, psychiatric and funeral costs, lost wages, money spent on child care and crime scene clean-up.

Only qualified applicants are eligible for compensation. Examples include a victim of violent crime who suffers physical and/or emotional harm, or surviving family members of a murder victim.

An individual is disqualified for benefits if he or she knowingly or willingly participated in the crime, is the offender or an accomplice of the offender, was incarcerated in a penal institution at the time of the crime, or knowingly or intentionally submitted false or forged information to the Attorney General.

Every law enforcement agency in Texas is required to provide victims of crime with information about the Crime Victims' Compensation program and an application form. Applications are also available through local prosecutors' offices. In addition, hospitals and medical centers may have applications. You can also contact my office directly for an application.

Victim assistance coordinators and liaisons may also provide referrals for further assistance.

Payments to victims have increased at a record rate, but Crime Victims' Compensation Fund revenues are not keeping pace.

Although great progress has been made in helping victims of crime, there are difficult challenges ahead. The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund, which is the sole source of direct compensation to victims, will become insolvent in the next fiscal year if the Legislature does not act to bolster revenues that were diverted to other programs in previous legislative sessions. In the 2000-2001 biennium, for example, the Legislature moved \$13 million from the Fund to other agencies. That amount increased to \$114 million in the 2004-2005 biennium, with some of the money going to programs that, while worthy, are not directly related to crime victims.

Earlier this year, I vowed to protect the Fund and convened a statewide group of victim advocates to look for solutions to the solvency concerns. The group will soon be issuing its findings to the Legislature. I look forward to working with the legislators to save the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund. The victims of violent crime are counting on us.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Crime Victims' Compensation Fund

Crime Victims' Services Division
Office of the Attorney General
Monday - Friday
8:00 am - 5:00 pm
(800) 983-9933

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-7233

National Organization for
Victim Assistance (NOVA)
(24 hours/day)
(800) TRY-NOVA

National Center for Victims of Crime
(8:30 am- 8:30 pm EST)
(800) FYI-CALL

Family Violence Legal Hotline
(Recording announces operating hours)
(800) 374-4673

Texas Council on Family Violence
(800) 525-1978



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

Information on this and other topics is available on the
Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.