



## **BRYAN COUNTY LOCAL VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE HOLDS MEETING ON LOCAL VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FUND DISTRIBUTION**

**BRYAN COUNTY, GA – Aug. 19, 2019** – Recently, the Bryan County Local Victim Assistance Program Advisory Committee for the Local Victim Assistance Program (LVAP) held a meeting. The committee was formed in response to a request received a few months ago by an organization that had recently earned certification from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) to provide services to residents of Bryan County.

In all, there are now six entities certified by the CJCC, including the recently accredited organization, that are certified to provide LVAP services to Bryan County residents. When funds are received from the courts – as a result of fines being collected – the total amount received is currently remitted to the Atlantic Judicial Circuit Victim Assistance program which is administered by the Atlantic Judicial Circuit District Attorney's office. Atlantic Judicial Circuit Victim Assistance program is one of the six entities certified by CJCC to provide services to Bryan County residents.

This system has worked for years, but the recent certification of a new program and Bryan County's serious growth have local leaders anticipating the certification of more programs. Rather than continue the current distribution method, Bryan County decided to form a committee that would accept funding applications from all CJCC-certified service providers and recommend the allocation of available money to those programs that meet all requirements and that provide the most needed services within the county. As more programs become eligible for funding over the coming years, Bryan County desired to ensure that a process is put in place that handles funding requests fair and equitably. This process helps to ensure that goal.

Certification permits local victim assistance programs to request funding through their County Board of Commissioners, according to Georgia Annotated Code § 15-21-132, which is posted on the CJCC's website. Those requesting funds do not have to be domiciled in Bryan County; they need only provide services to Bryan County residents.

This is important, according to J. Robert Thornton, an attorney who serves as the director of the CJCC's Justice and Compliance Division. Many certified organizations provide services to victims outside of the counties they are located in. For example, there are currently 48 state-certified domestic violence shelters that provide shelter to all 159 counties state-wide. Many of these serve their entire judicial circuit, which can range from one county to eight counties, while some even provide services to counties in more than one circuit.

Those who've been a victim of a violent crime often need services that Victim Witness Assistance Programs housed in District Attorney's offices are in unique positions to provide and help with, which is why the DA-run programs are eligible to be certified to receive LVAP funds.

"The DA's office programs can help a victim who is now involved in a court case navigate the criminal justice system. If someone was victimized and now the alleged perpetrator is being prosecuted by the DA's office, the victim is entitled to be involved in the proceedings. It's important that he or she has the assistance of a prosecution-based victim advocate to assist them in understanding and dealing with the criminal justice system as it relates to the crimes committed against them," Thornton said.

In addition, those who were victims of violent crimes will need to apply to receive money from the Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Program, which eases the financial burden faced by victims by covering expenses related to medical bills, funeral expenses, mental-health counseling and crime-scene sanitization, as well as loss of income or support. That program is managed by the CJCC, said Thornton, and while all certified programs are required to refer victims to the program, most referrals come from DA's offices, which help with the application process.

Bryan County's new committee is taking all these facts and considerations under advisement as it evaluates applications and prepares to issue funding recommendations. Committee members include Juvenile Judge Christy Balboa, Bryan County Finance Director John Rauback, Richmond Hill Finance Director Robert Whitmarsh, Sheriff Clyde Smith, Bryan County Family Connections Director Wendy Sims, resident Tracy Walden-Stafford, and Pembroke Public Safety Director Williams Collins.

Weeks before its first meeting, the committee called for funding applications from the six certified service providers in the area. Four programs submitted applications in hopes of being granted a percentage of the funding. During last week's meeting, the committee studied those applications and heard presentations from all four applying service providers. The committee will meet again and formulate its recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for funding allocation among the organizations that put in for consideration.

The committee will provide its recommendations to the Bryan County Commission, which will then vote on the proposed funding distribution. The board will meet annually to repeat this process. For more information about Bryan County, please visit [www.bryancountyga.org](http://www.bryancountyga.org).

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For media inquiries, please contact Hollie Barnidge at [hollie@lesleyfrancispr.com](mailto:hollie@lesleyfrancispr.com) or 912-272-8651 or Lesley Francis at [lesley@francis.com](mailto:lesley@francis.com) or 912-429-3950 or the team at 912-417-LFPR (5377).