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Domestic violence services facing federal funding cuts

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Family Resources officials are concerned reductions in federal funding will result in a cut in domestic violence services, putting more abuse victims at risk.

On July 1, Illinois will see a 25 percent reduction in Victims of Crime Act funds -- which come from fines in federal court cases -- and a 20 percent cut in Violence Against Women Act federal funds for agencies involved with domestic violence programs.

"VOCA and VAWA are federal dollars we receive on a yearly basis," said Violeta Talandis, director of victim services at Family Resources Inc. "They are not tax dollars. These are restitution funds that criminals pay."

She said Family Resources may have to cut up to \$64,000 from its Victim Services Program's approximate \$1.5 million budget for the next fiscal year.

"That translates into a significant impact on victim services," Ms. Talandis said. "These cuts mean more waiting lists, more families forced to be in violent situations or relationships where they can't get the help they need. It's a total abandonment of helping families who are trying to live a violent-free life."

Not only will domestic violence programs and organizations see reductions, but government offices that offer victim services and programs -- from prosecutors to law enforcement agencies and the courts -- also will see cuts.

Victim services that could be impacted include a legal advocate who assists victims in the court system, counselors for children and sexual assault victims, a 24-hour crisis line, community advocates who address domestic violence and abuse issues in schools, and a 24-hour emergency advocate who helps victims with medical or legal issues.

"We are with the client every step of the way," including court trials, Ms. Talandis said. "These are all services in danger because of these cuts."

Not only could services be reduced, but staff positions could be eliminated. There are 27 employees in the Victim Services Program.

The impact of domestic violence is widespread, Ms. Talandis said. "This affects everyone, from teachers to judges to everyone on the street. Your tax dollars go up when police have to respond to domestic calls."

Last year, about 1,700 Quad-Citians were served by Family Resources' Victim Services Program, which includes the domestic violence and sexual assault programs and the shelter.

Last year, the shelter served 342 women and children, but 656 people were referred to other shelters because of a lack of space.

Ms. Talandis said that one in four women are affected by domestic violence and are at risk of being sexually assaulted before reaching age 18, and one in six males are at risk of abuse before age 18.

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