







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Area agencies hope for additional funding for crime victims

Officials say tight budgets mean an increase in funding is unlikely.

by Kathleen Thurber
Midland Reporter-Telegram

Published: Sunday, February 1, 2009 12:29 AM CST

When the Regional Planning Commission meets this month to prioritize 2009 fund requests from area agencies that provide services to victims of crimes they'll likely be dividing an amount of money thousands of dollars short of requests.

"Clearly this is going to be a difficult budget cycle," said Sen. Kel Seliger, vice chair of the Senate Criminal Justice committee. "We're simply trying to help where we can and see if there are different sources."

In 2008, just more than \$22 million was allocated to Texas from the Office for Victims of Crime, down from \$26.6 million in 2007 and more than \$28 million in 2006, according to the Office of the Governor.

Once divided among state regions, the Permian Basin received about \$280,000 for the funding cycle starting in the fall of 2008, down from \$555,071 given the previous year and \$976,204 the year before that.

While the state did experience a funding cut of nearly 12 percent from 2007 to 2008, local service providers said they were shocked by the nearly 50 percent cut for the Permian Basin two years in a row.

"The cuts this region have taken have been just huge," said Executive Director of the Midland Rape and Children's Advocacy Crisis Center Betty Dickerson. "I've submitted the grant. We have no idea what the region's going to get."

Dickerson's was one of the agencies funded through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) after the 2008 application process. But the funds for the center were cut by \$45,000 two years ago, she said.

The funds come from criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties and special assessments collected by the U.S. Attorney's Office, federal U.S. Courts and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, according to the Office for Victims of Crime. They're divided to help compensate victims and fund victim assistance programs.

Once allocated by the federal government, Gov. Rick Perry's office divides the funds to areas in Texas based on crime statistics and population. The Permian Basin saw its crime statistics in 2007 decrease, which may be part of why it received less.

Before funds are divided between regions by the governor's office, said Perry spokeswoman Katherine Cesinger, area councils of governments prioritize needs, and money is provided down the list of ranked applicants in each region until it runs out.

For the Permian Basin, though, that meant only three of seven agencies that applied received funding during the last cycle. At times there have been more than 15 programs receiving VOCA funding in the Permian Basin.

Harmony Home in Odessa, which provides support to abused children and their families, was not funded at all after receiving \$133,000 in grants the year before, said its Executive Director Rodney Hall.

