

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 9, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 50 :COURT SERVICE UNIT CASEWORKER POSITION FOLLOW UP

---

At the Public Safety work session held on March 1, 2010, the Mayor asked that the Court Service Unit (CSU) proposed elimination of a full-time Caseworker position (budgeted at \$57,539 in the Intensive Case Management activity) be deferred to the Youth and Education work session in order to align the discussion to school truancy issues. During the continuation of the Youth and Education budget work session held on March 24, Vice Mayor Donley, Councilman Krupicka and Councilman Smedberg requested a budget memorandum to respond to some of the questions raised in the discussion of Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA) grant and related positions. The following will respond to those questions:

***1. Why did the Court Service Unit propose cutting a position that targets the City and School's strategic plan goal of improving drop-out rates?***

The CSU is funded by State, City and federal sources. After a review of all funded resources within the court service unit, it was determined that probation officers and case managers were already overcapacity in the number of youth that they were supervising in the community. Supervision of juveniles involved in the court system is a top priority of CSU. CSU determined that the Caseworker position would have to be eliminated (since a prevention and early court intervention program is considered a lower priority) in order to meet budget guidelines issued by OMB. As a result the services to the truant youth served by that position would have to be terminated.

***2. How is the position funded?***

The Caseworker position is 55% City supported and 45% grant funded from the 1995 Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act. (VJCCCA) (Code section 16.1-309.2).

VJCCCA was created to address the needs of juvenile justice youth who have the same or more needs as other youth who receive services but have been a historically underserved population. Many juvenile justice youth do not have equal access to many community-based programs because of their court involvement.

The purpose and intent of VJCCCA is to specifically target juveniles who are recently involved in the court system or are at-risk of entering the court system. This includes children who are delinquent or who are in need of services (truants and runaways). VJCCCA funds programs that target youth who are exhibiting behaviors that put them at a high risk of future involvement in the court system. The VJCCCA also requires that less secure facilities like Sheltercare and funded community programs have the primary goal of providing alternatives to detention.

In FY2010, the City received State funding in the amount of \$251,443, to fund two types of programs: the Sheltercare program (\$193,358) and community programs operated by the CSU (\$58,085). Due to State budget cuts, in FY2011 these funds were reduced by 4.7% (\$11,939) to \$239,504.

### ***3. Why is the Court Service Unit providing this service and not another youth-serving agency?***

Based on the VJCCCA program requirements, the Court Service Unit established several community programs devoted to the targeted population and to address unmet needs in the City. A Day Reporting program was established to provide after school services to youth on probation. This activity was located at the Sheltercare facility (located adjacent to the Juvenile Detention Home on South Whiting Street).

Along with this program, the VJCCCA grant provided funding for a School Suspension program at the CSU for court-involved youth who were suspended from school and an Intensive Case Management program for youth and their families who needed services as they re-entered community life after a period of incarceration. The grant also funded multiple other services such as anger management groups, parent education, a shoplifter's deterrence program, field trips and mentoring programs such as IMovie Mentor and Space of Her Own (SOHO).

Over the years, VJCCCA grant funds have sustained multiple cuts. CSU sought other grant funding which helps to fund the two mentoring programs, however, the Day Reporting program and the School Suspension program proved to be too difficult to sustain with diminished State dollars. As a result, the Day Reporting program was replaced with the Intensive Case Management program to continue to provide a daily structure for court involved youth to improve their social and academic functioning at home, in the community and at school.

As required by Virginia compulsory education laws, the CSU works in partnership with Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) on truancy and drop-out issues. One way both agencies collaborate is by co-leading the Attendance Review Panel. This multi-agency panel reviews almost 200 cases of chronic truants per year and identified a need for more intensive case management for chronically truant youth. These youth and families pose a multitude of issues and problems and can be very resistant to services. In many areas the families have been offered various services from the school system and other youth serving agencies but the results were not successful. Parents and youth were persistently absent from counseling meetings or did not comply with attendance, academic, behavior or other school requirements and there was no way to hold parents and youth accountable for non-compliance.

With respect to the Attendance Review Panel, ACPS staff felt especially strongly that the CSU should assume case management of these cases to improve compliance. Cases are referred by the Attendance Review Panel directly to the CSU case worker. The youth referred are petitioned by the CSU intake department to the Court as a Child in Need of Services and are supervised and provided services for a six month period. If they comply with school requirements, the case is dismissed. If they do not comply, there are several sanctions imposed that can be applied to both the child and the parent. The Court has the authority to order the parent, as well as the child, to comply with the conditions of this court ordered supervision. Since providing intensive case management for these cases in FY 2009, the CSU maintains a 90% compliance rate.

**4. *Is providing services and supervision part of the core service of the Court Service Unit?***

It is important to understand that the Code of Virginia specifically places jurisdiction of chronically truant youth in the local CSU. The Virginia Department of Social Services can also be involved if the child is found to be abused or homeless. The CSU staff handles cases of chronically truant youth on a regular basis and receives annual mandatory case management, mental health skills and legal training. Immediate access to the court system has a strong influence on case compliance. Youth needing long-term supervision (more than 6 months) are placed on probation and currently one-third of youth (about 120) on probation are children in need of services and have never committed a delinquent act. However, it is well-established knowledge in the Juvenile Justice arena that children in need of services often are only one step away from becoming delinquent.

**5. *Where will the funding come from if this position is not eliminated?***

During the past several years, the CSU has implemented graduated sanctions with probation youth who are noncompliant with probation conditions. When youth comply with probation conditions, they are rewarded or given incentives by probation officers. When youth are out of compliance, not involving a criminal act, probation officers ramp up the conditions of probation so that monitoring and supervision is increased and the youth is asked to comply with additional rules. This best practice method of working with problem youth is found to be more effective in changing behavior than the use of detention.

As a result of the use of graduated sanctions, CSU has decreased the utilization of beds for City youth detention at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home. The City contribution to this agency decreased \$152,859, or 9.6%; attributable to the application of average actual utilization rates for the past 3 years (from 2007 to 2009), including utilizations by the City of Alexandria (35.2%), Arlington County (61.4%) and Falls Church (3.4%). \$58,327 of this decrease was applied to the Detention Home's FY 2011 proposed budget, with \$94,532 remaining to be applied.

If approved by Council, the costs to fund the position (\$57,539) could come from the above mentioned \$94,532 savings and be used to continue providing youth with community alternatives to detention.

***6. How will this service be coordinated with the youth programs coordinated services initiative?***

At this time, the structure and service design of the consolidated Department of Human Services (DHS), Community Service Board (CSB) and Office on Women is still in progress. When that process is closer to completion, the CSU will be collaborating, along with other City agencies and nonprofits, in a coordinated effort to fund the best resource and most efficient way to deliver City services to the court-involved and at-risk youth population.