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## Compensation for Victims of Crime

JEFFERSON CITY — Many times, we hear about the punishments given to those who break the law.

Whether it is a slap on the wrist for a first-time offender or the ultimate punishment for the most heinous of crimes, we do everything possible to make sure the punishment fits the crime. But after the bad guys are locked up, what about the victims? Is it justice enough for them to see their attackers locked up? There is compensation for them through the federal government in the form of federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to private and public agencies.

Just recently, it was announced that \$7.4 million in federal VOCA money would be coming Missouri's way. The money will go to private and public agencies to help crime victims by providing direct services to help victims stabilize their lives. It funds programs that serve victims of sexual assault, spousal abuse, child abuse, underserved populations of victims of violent crimes in addition to victims of various other crimes. VOCA funding often goes to programs that offer crisis intervention, emergency services, support services, court-related services, and training. Direct services, such as crisis intervention, personal advocacy and support, criminal justice and court advocacy/support, emergency legal advocacy, shelter/safe house placement, case management, counseling necessary due to the crime and information/referral, are funded with this money.

Several of the agencies benefiting from the money are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senatorial District. One such place is The Child Center, Inc., in Wentzville. The folks at this child advocacy center have the goal of meeting the needs of children, teens, and families. They use an emotionally supportive team approach to help those affected by child abuse as well as working to educate the public on how to prevent abuse in the future. Part of their mission statement — *"Healing – Helping – Hope"* — summarizes their approach to address the situation as a whole and to give those victims of abuse hope for the future. The center provides services to people in St. Charles and Lincoln counties in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senatorial District, as well as those in Warren, Montgomery, Pike, Ralls, Marion, Monroe, Lewis, and Clark counties. Nearby, in the City of St. Charles, VOCA money is going to Bridgeway Counseling Services, Inc., (including The Women's Center and The Terry L. Robertson Center); Youth In Need, Inc.; and the Victims of Crime Assistance and the Eleventh Circuit Court Appointed Special Advocates programs of St. Charles County.

While the federal VOCA program has been helping Americans since Congress passed the measure back in 1984, the state is taking its own initiatives to help crime victims in Missouri as well. The governor has just called for more than \$2.3 million to be made available in next year's budget to cover medical exam costs associated with rape or sexual assault. He's also recommending that \$1.8 million be made available in the supplemental budget to protect victims. When we come back in to session and start working on next fiscal year's budget, I'm sure I'll have no trouble convincing my colleagues that these are important programs we need to fund.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.