



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

Elaine M. Howle, State Auditor

FACT SHEET

Date: December 9, 2008

Report: 2008-113

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board

It Has Begun Improving the Victim Compensation Program, but More Remains to Be Done

BACKGROUND

Medical and dental care, mental health services, and lost wages or support are just some of the eligible services the Victim Compensation Program (program) can cover for victims of crime. Administered by the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board (board), the program is financed through restitution fines, penalty assessments, and other amounts collected by the State and counties and through a federal grant. The board contracts with 21 joint powers (JP) units throughout the State to aid in approving or denying applications and bills. The JP units are located within the victim witness assistance centers (assistance centers), which oversee a variety of services to victims and provide outreach for the board and the program. Verifying entities, such as law enforcement, physicians, or hospitals, provide proof of a crime or an injury resulting from a crime.

KEY FINDINGS

Our review of the board and program's funding structure and accessibility of services to victims of crimes revealed the following:

- ◆ Total payments to victims and/or service providers from fiscal years 2001–02 through 2004–05 sustained a 50 percent decrease—from \$123.9 million to \$61.6 million. Despite this significant decline, the cost the board incurs to support the program increased.
- ◆ The board did not always process applications and bills promptly. Specifically, the board:
 - Did not make a determination within its own maximum deadline of 180 days for two applications of the 49 that we tested.
 - Took more than 250 days to resolve appeals for four of five denied applications that we reviewed and, as of October 2008, had yet to resolve the fifth after more than one year.
 - Took more than 90 days to pay 23 bills of 77 paid bills that we reviewed.
- ◆ The board's follow-up procedures for and communications with verifying entities lack detail and lead to inconsistencies. Moreover, at times verifying entities did not cooperate in providing prompt responses to the board and JP units.
- ◆ The board has experienced numerous problems with its new system for processing applications and bills, including:
 - Processing delays led to a reported increase in complaints.
 - Unbeknownst to the board, data in the system related to payments appeared erroneous.
 - Needed documentation for the new system has yet to be created, hampering efforts to resolve problems cost-effectively.
- ◆ The board's current process for managing workload lacks benchmarks, performance measures, or any written procedures.
- ◆ The board has not established a comprehensive outreach plan to assist in focusing on those in need of program services.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made various recommendations to the board that include establishing goals that create a target fund balance and are designed to measure its success in maximizing assistance to victims and their families. We also recommended that the board develop specific procedures for following up with verifying entities. Moreover, the board should continue to correct system problems, develop and maintain system documentation, and develop written procedures for managing workload. Further, to develop a comprehensive and focused outreach plan, the board should seek input from key stakeholders regarding underserved and vulnerable populations.



