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MEMO

DATE: February 23, 2024
TO: Patrice Sutton, County Administrator
FROM: Eric Rinehart, State's Attorney
RE: Request for new position, Senior Victim Specialist

The State's Attorney's Office is requesting a new Senior Victim Specialist position due to increased workload in our Victim Services Division since the implementation of the SAFE-T Act.

Our office was graciously given one K10 ASA position during the FY2022 budget in anticipation of the SAFE-T Act going into effect on January 1, 2023 (We originally requested 2 attorney positions and one victim specialist). When the Act ultimately went into effect on September 18, 2023, after a delay from appeals in Court, our office immediately filled the K10 Attorney Safe-T Act position. While we could certainly use an additional attorney to assist with the increased workload tied to the detention process, we have been managing these duties with our new (K10) headcount and through the work of current staff.

That being said, new notification procedures, new timelines in the detention process, and new defense attorney tactics require us to request an additional Senior Victim Specialist.

Instead of single court appearance in which a cash bond is decided, the SAFE-T Act requires a two-step process. The first step is called "First Appearance Court." At this court date, the State decides whether to file a detention petition. That petition is then heard during a second step called "the Detention Hearing." These Detention Hearings must occur relatively quickly as agreed upon by the judge and the attorneys – usually within 48 hours not counting weekends. Appropriately, the SAFE-T Act requires the victims to be notified of the specific time and place of the detention hearing. This type of notification was never required before September 18, 2023, and is one of the reasons so many victim advocacy groups supported the SAFE-T Act.

Our current Victim Specialists average caseloads of over 200 victims and survivors at any given time. They serve as the first and continued contact person for the victim throughout a criminal case. Our office has assisted approximately 300 victims with detention hearings since the SAFE-T Act went into effect on September 18th, 2023. Our current group of Victim Specialists have taken on this new work, but we worry that victim service will be

compromised without additional staffing.

The urgency of immediate victim contact regarding detention hearings, coupled with the difficulties that can be associated with reaching victims in diverse and high poverty areas, make the need for an additional Victim Specialist even more crucial. Our Victim Specialist staff have found themselves challenged to find a balance between working with existing caseload victims and meeting the needs of the new detention process.

Our biggest fear is that victims will be unaccompanied in the courtroom during the crucial detention proceedings where defense attorneys could engage in strategic behavior or provide one-sided information about the process. The detention hearings themselves are also taking longer than we anticipated, leaving victim specialists waiting with victims in detention court for entire afternoons.

We have spent the last five months learning to navigate the new requirements under the SAFE-T Act and have come to the realization that we need more staff to continue the exemplary service to victims that we pride ourselves on. We are asking the County to create and fund a Senior Victim Specialist dedicated to victim support work under the SAFE-T Act. The total needed to fund this request is \$97,000. This includes \$64,000 in salary, \$30,000 in benefits, and \$3,500 in computer equipment for the position.

I am available for any additional questions that County Administration or the Lake County Board have on this request.

Respectfully submitted,



Eric F. Rinehart
Lake County State's Attorney