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REPORT TO GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2024

SUBJECT **Advocacy to Sustain Funding for At-Risk Youth Counselling**

ISSUE SUMMARY

The Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (the “Committee”) requests an advocacy letter from the CRD Board to request ongoing Provincial support for the sole youth counsellor position servicing youth at risk of sexual exploitation in the capital region.

BACKGROUND

At its June 27, 2024 meeting, the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee unanimously passed the following motion:

That the Victoria Family Court & Youth Justice Committee recommends the Governance Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board that the CRD Board Chair send an advocacy letter to the Province to encourage renewed support for the Pacific Centre Family Services Association’s Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) and its Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED) program, with consistent and sustainable funding for the MYST youth counsellor position in the very near future due to the critical and urgent work with vulnerable youth and their families with the CRD.

The MYST team consists of one youth counsellor and one police officer. Together they have thousands of support interactions with youth and families and conduct presentations in schools and in the community. The counselling position provides much-needed support and diversion services to youth at risk of sexual exploitation. The position is funded entirely by project-based grant funding, while the police officer is funded through a three-year rotation through Saanich, Victoria, and Oak Bay Police.

In January 2023, after the program’s three-year Provincial funding expired, Chair Plant drafted a letter of support along with several other local governments. This was responded by Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth, who confirmed one-time, one-year funding of \$130,000 to provide these necessary services.

Pacific Centre Family Services’ Association, which employs the youth counsellor position, had its most recent Provincial funding application denied, and as a result, the youth counsellor position funding runs-out in September. If there is no regular source of funding identified, PCFSA will no longer be able to provide youth counselling.

The MYST program arose in the early 2000s from the work of the Capital Region Action Team on Sexually Exploited Youth, and is heavily supported by the Committee, a *Provincial Court Act* family court committee which has as its mandate the canvassing of gaps in youth and family court and justice services in the capital region.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Victoria Family Court & Youth Justice Committee recommends the Governance Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the CRD Board Chair send an advocacy letter to the Province to encourage renewed support for the Pacific Centre Family Services Association's Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) and its Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED) program, with consistent and sustainable funding for the MYST youth counsellor position in the very near future due to the critical and urgent work with vulnerable youth and their families with the CRD.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Implications

A loss of the youth counsellor would have significant impact for young people serviced by the program, many of whom are LGBTQ2+ or First Nations and at risk of online luring, prostitution, sextortion, or sexualized violence. While other organizations do exist that provide drop-in assistance or counselling generally, the CRED program is specific for youth at-risk of sexual violence and exploitation, and works closely with police to ensure youth are adequately supported and can be diverted from negative impacts, personally and with the justice system. It is unique in the region and the committee was advised that there is heavy demand for its counselling services.

Intergovernmental Implications

Given the continued advocacy from the CRD Board on this issue and the lack of sustained, secure, ongoing funding from the Provincial and Federal Governments, the CRD's member municipalities may wish to look at modifying an existing CRD contribution service to provide ongoing funding. CRD's municipalities, excepting North Saanich, currently participate in the Greater Victoria Victims Services under Bylaw No. 1998, "Greater Victoria Victim Services Extended Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1, 1992". The Committee's funding service under Bylaw No 2560, "Family Court Committee Extended Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1, 1997", also permits making of grants but has a small annual budget of \$15,000. Either service authority bylaw could be modified by two-thirds consent of participants to include a direct contribution to PCFSA to cover or contribute to the cost of youth counsellors.

CONCLUSION

The MYST and CRED programs are of importance to the region, as determined by the Committee, and it has requested the CRD Regional Board continue its advocacy to the Province for sustained provincial funding. Should funding continue to not be sustained or supported by the Province or Federal Government, the CRD Board may wish in future to consider more direct funding from a CRD service.

RECOMMENDATION

The Victoria Family Court & Youth Justice Committee recommends the Governance Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the CRD Board Chair send an advocacy letter to the Province to encourage renewed support for the Pacific Centre Family Services Association's Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) and its Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED) program, with consistent and sustainable funding for the MYST youth counsellor position in the very near future due to the critical and urgent work with vulnerable youth and their families with the CRD.

Submitted by:	Steven Carey, B.Sc, J.D., Senior Manager, Legal Services & Risk Management
Concurrence:	Kristen Morley, J.D., General Manager, Corporate Services & Corporate Officer
Concurrence:	Angela Linwood, CPA, CMA, Acting Chief Financial Officer
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A: January 2023 Letter from Chair Plant

Appendix B: April 2023 Response from Province