

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Rachel Perkins, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

Washington State marriage license fees increased by \$100 statewide when House Bill 1498 came into effect in July last year, raising the amount newlyweds pay in Jefferson County from \$44 to \$144. These new fees go into the Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account, a new program designed to fund a trained domestic violence co-responder to accompany police when they respond to domestic violence-related crimes. The fund is administered by the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy.

Because the Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account is a new program, there has been a delay in the money's availability for the grants that will be used to train co-responders and administer the program. An average of 41,000 couples get married in Washington state per year, which is expected to provide a yearly budget of approximately \$4.1 million for domestic violence co-responders. As of February 2026, the account balance is \$2.2 million.

The inspiration for the Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account came in part because a prior House Bill, 1169, made crime victim penalty assessments – fees used to pay for victim advocacy in the prosecutor's office – discretionary, limiting the role of victim advocates dramatically. At the time House Bill 1169 passed, the fund for victim advocates contained \$8 million per year. The state promised to make up for this loss, but in the past three years there have been no deposits from the state. In the most recent legislative session, the state elected to fund only 20% of what they initially said they would fund.

Victim advocates support domestic violence victims, as well as victims of homelessness, families in crisis, and sexual assault victims. \$4 million from the new Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account was transferred as a one-time deposit to help fund victim advocate work in prosecutors offices.

In the State of Washington, general victim services agencies get a percentage of their funding from the federal fund established by the Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA. Since 2018, the VOCA fund has seen a 70% decrease, resulting in a victims services crisis. The plummet comes from federal enforcement favoring non-prosecution agreements over high-dollar fines for white-collar crime, leading to a decline in deposits. The *Beacon* recently reported on the effects of the VOCA funding crash on local advocacy agency, Dove House, along with other federal grant conflicts they are facing.

Traditional treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence, called Domestic Violence Intervention Treatment, or DVIT, was shown to be unsuccessful in 2014, and over time, judges stopped ordering DVIT. Half of all crimes in Washington are domestic violence crimes. The number one predictor of whether a person is likely to commit a violent crime is if they already have a history of being a domestic violence assailant.

Two programs had funding secured for new domestic violence rehabilitation research for Washington state. The trials were highly successful in rehabilitating domestic violence perpetrators, revealing impressive outcomes very different from the ones seen with traditional DVIT. But in 2025, both studies were only partway through when Governor Ferguson vetoed 30 or more studies state-wide, rescinding the funding in last year's budget to continue the research. In an effort to finish the studies, \$750,000 from the new Domestic Violence Co-responder Account has been allocated to those two programs to further their work.

The allocations from the co-responder fund don't end there. Another new House Bill, 1427, allows approved peer support organizations to bill insurance in the state of Washington. The Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account contributed a one-time payment of \$50,000 for the creation of a training program to train peer support

advocates. By crediting advocates as peers and giving them the appropriate training, insurance billing could save the state \$15 to \$18 million in victim advocacy costs. That leaves \$2.2 million in the Domestic Violence Co-Responder Account for 2026-2027. House Bill 1498's main sponsor, Representative Lauren Davis, is confident that's still enough to get the Domestic Violence Co-Responder Program started.

Reporting on this story by Angela Downs

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. This is Rachel Perkins. Thanks for listening.