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From: Rossi, Megan (OVS)
Sent: Wednesday, October 17, 2018 10:18 AM
To: ovs.dl.Grants; ovs.dl.ExecutiveStaff
Subject: Broadcast Email-Paying Recurring Storage fees

THE FOLLOWING IS A BROADCAST EMAIL TO ALL OVS FUNDED VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Dear Colleague:

The Office of Victim Services (OVS) has done everything it can to make paying recurring storage fees as easy as possible for victims. However, due to the business practices of many of these storage facilities across the state, we are forced to change our process.

It is not possible for OVS to pay each monthly fee as an Emergency Award (EA). The first month's payment for the storage fees certainly can, and will continue to be granted as an EA, and if the claim is still being investigated when the second payment comes due, OVS may award an EA for that as well. However, once there is a decision rendered and the claim is closed-awarded, OVS must establish a better way to pay the subsequent monthly bills.

We had set up what we thought was a good process to fast-track all subsequent bills so we could pay them as an Additional Medical payment, which would get them to the facility on time to avoid late charges; but that was only if the victim got the bill to us in time.

To further complicate this matter, OVS payments are made through the Statewide Financial System (SFS) and many storage facilities are often part of larger corporations. OVS has found that the individual "branches" of the storage corporations do not properly register with SFS. When this happens, the payments go directly to the corporate office and may take some time to get credited to the proper branch. Meanwhile, the local branch considers the bill unpaid and imposes late fees or threatens to auction the victims' belongings.

Due to these administrative and practical challenges, OVS has no choice but to make any subsequent storage payments on a closed-awarded claim on a reimbursement basis only. The victim will need to make the next payment and submit a receipt for reimbursement.

This new process began impacting new claims and/or new requests for storage fees received as of May 21, 2018. Any previously determined claims and/or requests for storage fees with recurring fees already being handled have not been affected. Going forward, when OVS awards an EA for storage, we will let the victim and advocate know that once the decision is rendered, they will have to pay the next month's storage fee themselves and send us the receipt. We can fast-track the receipts just like we tried to do with the facilities so that they will get their refund as soon as possible.

We realize this is an inconvenience, but this is the only manageable process for handling payments to these storage facilities and ensuring that victims are not saddled with late fees or even worse, losing their possessions.

On behalf of the New York State Office of Victim Services, thank you for your commitment to providing the highest quality services to innocent victims of crime in New York State.

Chet Fiske

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