FUNDING TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pervasive and life threatening crime that impacts millions of victims each year. Federal policies have helped to significantly reduce these crimes and increase safety for victims. Congress has the opportunity to build upon these successes toward ending domestic violence. We urge Congress to provide federal investments that will improve and save victims lives, hold perpetrators accountable, and work to end domestic violence.

☑️ Release additional funds from the Victims of Crime Act Fund (VOCA): VOCA is a fund for victim services created out of fines and penalties paid by federal criminals, rather than taxpayer dollars. Over 4,000 agencies rely on VOCA to provide services to nearly 4 million crime victims annually. We urge Congress to release $2.6 billion from the VOCA fund to address the gap in available services, as well as establish a VOCA tribal funding stream. Additionally, we urge Congress to support funding for the Vision 21 initiative.

☑️ Fund targeted investments in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA): VAWA programs at the U.S. Department of Justice are at the heart of our nation’s response to domestic violence. Each of these programs is critical to ensuring that victims are safe, that offenders are held accountable, and that our communities are more secure. Key programs within VAWA include:
  • The Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors (STOP) state formula grant program, which supports coordinated community responses to domestic and sexual violence, and is the foundation of our nation’s work to end domestic and sexual violence
  • The Civil Legal Services grant program helps to meet the civil legal needs of victims. By providing practical solutions and long-term stability for victims and their children, this program helps to lower incidents of domestic violence.
  • The Services for Rural Victims grant program, which enables communities to develop services to meet the unique needs facing victims in rural areas
  • The Transitional Housing grant program, which provides an essential continuum between emergency shelter and permanent safe housing for survivors fleeing violence
  • The Grants to Encourage Arrest program to increase offender accountability and reduce homicide.
  • The Sexual Assault Services Program, a state formula grant that funds rape crisis centers.

These, along with all of VAWA’s programs, must be funded at their full authorization levels in order to address the continued epidemic of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

☑️ Fund targeted investments for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act ($175 million) and related key programs at HHS: The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) funds emergency shelters, crisis lines, counseling, victim assistance, and other vital services for over one million domestic violence victims and their children each year. FVPSA funding has remained relatively stagnant, resulting in too few services available for victims in need. As the only dedicated federal funding source for domestic violence services, FVPSA should be funded at its full authorization amount of $175 million to meet the growing demand for services.

Additionally, we ask Congress to provide continued investments in additional programs at HHS that work to address and prevent domestic violence and sexual assault, such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline, DELTA prevention grants, and the Rape Prevention and Education program.

☑️ Fund emergency housing transfer vouchers at HUD: VAWA 2013 included a lifesaving emergency transfer provision for victims who need to flee their current housing. The law mandates that HUD devise procedures under which victims in assisted housing who are requesting emergency transfers can obtain tenant protection vouchers. We urge Congress to provide $37.5 million for approximately 5,000 vouchers would help keep survivors safe while reducing homelessness.
Commerce, Justice Science – Department of Justice

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) – release $2.6 billion from VOCA fund
VOCA uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund for several programs that serve victims of crime, including state formula victim assistance grants. The VOCA fund is generated through fines paid by federal criminals support services to 4 million victims of all types of crimes annually, through 4,400 direct service agencies such as domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and child abuse treatment programs. Additional VOCA funds are critically needed to respond to the crisis caused by the dangerous lack of available services for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

With an obvious need for increased funding, and more than $12 billion dollars in the Fund, now is the time to establish a long-term, logical and consistent basis for determining the annual VOCA cap in order to release additional money for the purpose Congress intended. The balance in the Crime Victims Fund is more than enough to significantly increase VOCA funding release without jeopardizing the Fund’s future sustainability.

The annual VOCA funding release should be set at a level no less than the average amount deposited into the Fund over the three previous fiscal years. This number is approximately $2.6 billion for FY16. Congress should also establish a VOCA funding stream for Native American victim services.

Finally, Congress should fund Vision 21, an initiative of the Department of Justice’s Office on Victims of Crime (OVC) Vision 21. Vision 21 should be funded out of the Appropriations process, not through VOCA funds.

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) programs

VAWA STOP Program – $222 million funding request
VAWA’s STOP Grant Program, one of the most far-reaching VAWA programs, is at the core of effective coordinated community responses to domestic violence and sexual assault. These responses help hundreds of thousands of victims find safety and receive services, while holding thousands of perpetrators accountable for their actions. As the foundational VAWA program, STOP awards funds to every state and territory through a formula-based system. States use STOP funding to train law enforcement, prosecution and courts to improve the system-wide response to domestic and sexual violence. Many states establish special units in law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices to address domestic and sexual violence. Victims benefit from services including advocacy, crisis intervention, local hotline call advocacy, counseling and support, and victim witness notification. Additionally, STOP-funded programs help survivors obtain orders of protection and promote the prosecution of domestic and sexual violence cases.

In 2012, STOP funds helped 430,350 victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking; funded over 2,200 staff; and provided professional training for over 200,000 individuals. Increased investment in STOP will allow communities to expand their lifesaving homicide reduction efforts, continue to improve their law enforcement and prosecution responses, and serve more victims.

We also request report language that would exempt the STOP program from being subject to the Prison Rape Education Act (PREA) penalty, which would cut 5% of this program’s funding in states that are not in compliance with PREA.

Civil Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) – $57 million funding request
Research indicates that the practical nature of legal services gives victims long-term alternatives to their abusive relationships. However, the retainers or hourly fees for private legal representation are beyond the means of most victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Legal services are second only to medical services as the most-requested need of victims. Sadly, 64% of women who reported needing legal services received no assistance from an attorney. The LAV program is the only federally funded program designed to meet the legal needs of victims. Targeted increases to the LAV program are a sound investment in long-term solutions to violence.
Rural Grant program – $50 million funding request
Rural victims face unique barriers, including under-resourced law enforcement and a lack of access to services, child care and public transportation. Funding for the Rural Grant Program, which supports services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault living in rural and isolated areas, has either been cut or remained stagnant for the last several years despite the great need and despite a number of states becoming newly eligible through the most recent VAWA reauthorization.

Transitional Housing program – $35 million funding request
The Transitional Housing program helps communities in every state give victims a safe place to begin to rebuild their shattered lives. In just one day in 2013, 5,270 adults and 7,561 children were housed in domestic violence transitional housing programs. On the same day, however, 5,778 requests for emergency shelter or transitional housing were denied due to a lack of capacity. The extreme dearth of affordable housing produces a situation where many victims of domestic violence must return to their abusers because they cannot find long-term housing, while others are forced into homelessness. Increased investment in the Transitional Housing program will allow more states and localities to ensure that victims have access to safe housing.

Grants to Encourage Arrest (GTEAP) – $73 million funding request
GTEAP helps communities develop and sustain a seamless and comprehensive criminal justice response to domestic violence by enhancing victims’ safety and holding perpetrators accountable. GTEAP encourages governments and courts at the state, local, and tribal level to to treat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking as serious violations of criminal law. The homicide reduction initiative set aside ($4 million) is designed to address the high homicide rate of abuse victims, especially those in escalating domestic violence situations.

Sexual Assault Services Program – $40 million funding request
The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) is the only federal funding source dedicated to providing direct services to adult and minor victims of sexual violence, and is distributed through a state formula grant. Services include accompaniment through medical and legal systems, hotlines, crisis intervention, and advocacy. Increased funding will help hire advocates, eliminate waiting lists, and respond to the unmet needs of victims. Research shows these services increase prosecution and help victims recover. When advocates are present in the legal and medical proceedings following rape, victims fare better in both the short- and long-term recovery, experiencing less psychological distress, physical health struggles, sexual risk-taking behaviors, self-blame, guilt, and depression. However, current funding levels are woefully inadequate to meet the need. The nation’s 1,315 sexual assault programs often lack the resources to meet victims’ most basic needs.

Remaining VAWA programs – full funding (see chart)
All VAWA programs work together to improve the system-wide response to domestic and sexual violence and to meet the unique and pressing needs of victims. VAWA programs, including new initiatives included in the President’s budget, should be funded at their full authorization levels.

Labor, Health and Human Services – Department of Health and Human Services

Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) – $175 million funding request
The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) program supports lifesaving services including emergency shelters, crisis hotlines, counseling, and programs for underserved communities throughout the United States and territories. Administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, FVPSA is the only federal funding source dedicated to domestic violence shelters and programs.

A recent multi-state study, funded by the National Institute of Justice, shows conclusively that the nation’s domestic violence shelters address both the urgent safety needs and long-term needs of victims. Despite FVPSA’s great promise, community-based domestic violence programs report that they cannot meet the overwhelming demand for services. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) DV Counts: Census found that in just one day...
during 2013, while more than 66,580 victims of domestic violence received services, nearly 10,000 requests for services went unmet, largely due to lack of funding. Of those unmet requests, 60% were for safe housing. In 2013, domestic violence programs funded by the Family Violence Prevention & Services Act (FVPSA) provided shelter and nonresidential services to more than 1.3 million victims. However, due to lack of capacity, an additional 186,552 requests for shelter went unmet. Increasing FVPSA funding will help more victims find safety, security and opportunities to rebuild their lives.

Related programs at the Department of Health and Human Services (see chart)
All programs work together to develop effective responses to domestic and sexual violence, and funding for these vital programs is important, as well. Key programs within the LHHS bill include the National Domestic Violence Hotline funded through the Administration for Children Youth and Families, as well as the DELTA domestic violence prevention grants, the Rape Prevention and Education state formula grants, and the Preventative Health and Health Services Block grant, funded through the Centers for Disease Control.

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Related Agencies

VAWA Emergency Transfer Vouchers
The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), reauthorized in 2013, expands landmark housing protections designed to ensure that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking can access the criminal justice system without facing discrimination or jeopardizing their current or future housing. VAWA 2013 included a lifesaving emergency transfer provision for victims who need to flee their current housing. The law mandates that HUD devise procedures under which victims in assisted housing who are requesting emergency transfers can obtain tenant protection vouchers.

Advocates and survivors identify housing as a primary need of victims and a critical component in survivors’ long term safety and stability. Despite their need for safe housing, countless victims become homeless as a result of these crimes or are forced to remain in danger. In accordance with VAWA 2013, victims who need to flee abuse and violence must be able to obtain transfer vouchers from PHAs within a reasonable amount of time, yet most PHAs do not have vouchers available for this purpose.

Congress should support the proposal in the Administration’s FY16 budget for $37.5 million for approximately 5,000 new vouchers for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking who require an emergency transfer from their current assisted housing, as authorized by VAWA 2013.