

Honorable Sherrod Brown
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Greg Landsman
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Joyce Beatty
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Robert Latta
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Max Miller
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Marcy Kaptur
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Shontel Brown
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Emilia Sykes
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Mike Carey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable J.D. Vance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Brad Wenstrup
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Jim Jordan
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Bill Johnson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Warren Davidson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Michael Turner
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Troy Balderson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable David Joyce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515



September 12, 2023

Dear Senator Brown, Senator Vance, Congressman Landsman, Congressman Wenstrup, Congresswoman Beatty, Congressman Jordan, Congressman Latta, Congressman Johnson, Congressman Miller, Congressman Davidson, Congresswoman Kaptur, Congressman Turner, Congresswoman Brown, Congressman Balderson, Congresswoman Sykes, Congressman Joyce, and Congressman Carey:

We are writing this letter as the statewide organizations representing victim service providers in the state of Ohio, prosecutors, social workers, nurses, as well as survivors of crime in support of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network's (ODVN's) request for a coordinated effort between Ohio's Congressional delegation to find a fix to the revenue shortfall in the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Crime Victims Fund ("the Fund"). Collectively, our associations represent more than 300 agencies of VOCA-supported victim service programs in Ohio.

In 2021, Congress passed the VOCA Fix Act, to address the immediate crisis of a dwindling Fund and allow for an expanded list of fines and penalties to be distributed into the Fund. The VOCA Fix is working, but fees and fines collected are not replenishing the Fund as quickly as necessary to keep victim service programs operational.

The VOCA appropriation for FY 2023 is \$1.9 billion. Earlier this summer, representatives from OAESV and ODVN met with Ohio members of Congress in Washington, DC to request their support in maintaining a level VOCA allocation (\$1.9 billion) for FY 2024. Despite nationwide efforts from our coalitions, the proposed FY 2024 VOCA allocation remains at a reduced \$1.2 billion – **a critical \$700 million reduction from 2023 to 2024 that will be keenly felt in Ohio.**

Even as we contemplate a catastrophic reduction in funding for 2024, we remind our Congressional delegation that Ohio's victim service providers already experienced significant funding VOCA cuts in 2019 and 2020. This has had an adverse impact on individuals, families, and communities experiencing violence in Ohio, and on the programs that serve them and work to prevent violence. **Without the necessary support from VOCA, victims and their families will not have access to essential services – because they will be reduced in many counties, if not completely removed.** When victims can't access needed services, there is little room for healing and accountability.

Caring about crime also means caring about victims of crime, and the agencies providing life-saving services to them. VOCA is both a source of support to victims and an economy and jobs

generator. Victim advocates rely on these funds to feed their families while they bear witness to crime victims' trauma and support them on their path to healing.

Our organizations collectively ask Ohio's Congressional delegation to pool their resources in order to find a solution to the issue for the shortfall in the Crime Victims Fund. Ohio's victim services programs cannot sustain another year of substantial VOCA cuts.

We collectively emphasize the crucial nature of a \$1.9 billion appropriation and highlight the impact on our agencies below:

Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center

"Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center ("OCVJC") provides free legal representation and advocacy services to victims of crime during the criminal justice process to ensure their constitutional and statutory rights are protected. OCVJC is one of approximately fifteen victims' rights legal clinics in the country and provides its services to victims throughout the entire state of Ohio. In recent months, victims' rights laws in Ohio have changed dramatically, leading to substantial increases in the number of victims seeking OCVJC's services.

VOCA funding is a large and critical piece of OCVJC's funding each year. Due to funding cuts over the last several years, OCVJC is already facing diminished staffing, which, of course, translates into a diminished ability to serve Ohio's victims. Further funding cuts would only significantly exacerbate the issues victims already face in obtaining free, high-quality services from OCVJC, OAESV, ODVN, and countless other service providers upon which victims rely to receive critical services and assistance in the aftermath of crime."

Ohio Victim Witness Association

"Ohio Victim Witness Association (OVWA) represents nearly 500 individual and organizational members across Ohio, encompassing systems-based and community-based crime victim advocates and allied professionals. Continued cuts to VOCA harm victims of crime by reducing the capacity of victim's services organizations to respond to requests for assistance. We hope that you'll join us in ensuring level VOCA funding for 2024."

Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association

"Victim of Crime Act funds are vital to prosecutors offices in their efforts to secure justice for the victims of crime and to promoting public safety. Prosecutors rely on VOCA grants to fund the victim assistance programs that enable prosecutors to keep victims informed about their case and ensure that they have quality services. These interactions with the victim help build trust between the victim and the prosecutor's office, trust that is critical to obtaining victim cooperation, to securing justice for them, and to getting future victims to come forward. In this way, VOCA funds promote public safety and greatly benefit the communities across Ohio."

Ohio Network of Child Advocacy Centers

"Children Advocacy Centers (CACs), are child-focused facilities that help abused children heal by coordinating the investigation and treatment of child sexual abuse and providing children and families access to long-term advocacy and healthcare. Ohio's CACs served over 11,000 abused

children in 2022 in partnership with local law enforcement departments, prosecutors, and children's services agencies. While VOCA funding has been reduced significantly, the need for CAC services in Ohio continues to grow with an increase in child services of approximately 2,000 more children being served this past year than in 2021. Ohio CACs often utilize VOCA funding to secure necessary multidisciplinary team members that provide services related to forensic interviews, victim advocacy, mental health services, and medical services and to promote multidisciplinary partnerships in pursuing healing and prosecution based justice. These services could be in jeopardy if VOCA funds continue to be reduced resulting in difficulty recruiting/retaining staff, increased wait times for services, delays in children's healing, and delays to assist law enforcement in pursuing criminal charges."

International Association of Forensic Nurses, Ohio Chapter

"An additional VOCA cut will strip forensic nursing programs of the funding needed to adequately protect victims of violent crime. We should provide individuals and communities experiencing violent crimes with greater support and access rather than remove the limited assistance already available to them. It is our belief that every victim of crime deserves access to a forensic exam. Increased access will not only save lives through medical interventions but will also provide victims with medical records to seek justice through the courts. In short, the services provided by forensic nurses are imperative and necessary to ensure the safety of victims. We know that victims of IPV are often strangled leaving them with life-threatening complications. The Ohio Chapter IAFN stands in support of providing the services needed to protect victims of all violent crimes. It is time to broaden access to services to all victims of violence, including victims who are strangled and harmed by their intimate partner."

Thank you for your time and consideration. We have greatly appreciated your support of crime victims in the past. If you need additional information regarding VOCA funding, and how it impacts nonprofits providing crime victims' services, please contact Emily Gemar (egemar@oaesv.org) and Maria York (mariay@odvn.org).