



Together we can end relationship abuse



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For more information, contact: Katie Wolf, Howes Wolf
Phone: (720) 365-3990
Email: Katie@HowesWolf.com

VICTIM SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS HOST TOUR FOR LEGISLATORS TO HIGHLIGHT FUNDING CRISIS

DENVER, CO – The Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA), Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA), and Violence Free Colorado brought legislative leaders together today to highlight the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funding crisis. Spearheaded by House Majority Leader Monica Duran, state legislators and staff toured Family Tree’s emergency domestic violence shelter, Roots of Courage, and learned about the array of services offered to people experiencing child abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness and heard a presentation by The Blue Bench, metro-Denver’s only sexual assault prevention and survivor support center. The tour ended with a panel of staff from the three coalitions, who detailed the importance of sustaining victim services and called on state leaders to allocate \$30 million to close the VOCA gap.

“The VOCA cliff is a national issue with monumental impact in every community across Colorado,” stated Mari Dennis, COVA’s Executive Director, “Over 200 agencies and organizations in the state of Colorado rely on federal VOCA funding to maintain vital victim services and protect public safety.” Currently, President Biden’s FY24 budget and the FY24 House and Senate CJS appropriations bills have proposed funding levels of \$1.2 billion for the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), which VOCA grants rely on, representing a 40% cut from the FY23 budget allocation of \$1.9 billion. According to the Colorado Department of Public Safety’s Division of Criminal Justice, which manages VOCA grants in the state, Colorado is facing an estimated reduction of up to 50% of current grant awards.

“It truly is a crisis,” explained Roshan Kalantar, Executive Director of Violence Free Colorado, “at this time—when the pandemic increased victims’ needs and overall demand for services, service providers also faced increased workloads, fewer resources, and reduced capacity—we cannot turn our backs on victims.” The coalitions and victim service agencies are calling on

Governor Polis and the Joint Budget Committee to ensure adequate funding so victims can receive the wraparound services they need to heal.

“While we appreciate the Governor’s acknowledgment in his FY24-25 budget proposal released yesterday of the importance in providing financial support for crime victims and survivors, the amount of money proposed to support these services falls far short of the need,” Kalantar continued. “We will continue to work with the Governor’s office, members of the Legislature’s Joint Budget Committee, and the entire General Assembly through the budget process to increase the amount of funding for victim and survivor services so that organizations helping meet the needs of crime victims and survivors can keep their doors open and lights on and can continue to provide services to those who desperately need them.”

“Cuts to VOCA will create significant challenges including staffing shortages and our ability to accommodate increasing needs of survivors fleeing violence,” said Cassie Ratliff, Family Tree’s Chief Impact Officer.

Brie Franklin, CCASA’s Executive Director, added, “The consequence of VOCA cuts in Colorado would be catastrophic. In Colorado, 75% of VOCA funds are allocated to community-based advocacy programs that are already working beyond their means to meet the growing needs of victims and survivors in their communities. As funding decreases, the largest impact will be to some of the smallest programs focused on rural communities, communities of color, children and youth, and culturally specific programs.”

“VOCA grants are the largest source of funding for survivor services, such as those we provide at The Blue Bench,” stated Megan Carvajal, Executive Director, “a drastic cut to that funding will mean fewer survivors accessing healing services and the possible elimination of prevention programming, which will cost our state more down the line in substance misuse, medical and mental health issues, financial impacts, and future victimization.”

Since 2021, statewide victim service coalitions in partnership with the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) have been raising the alarm on the state and federal levels about the enormous reduction of VOCA funding the state receives. If adequate funding is not provided, the consequences will be catastrophic to both victims and service providers.