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Temporary decrease in federal funding puts victims of crime at serious risk

Statewide non-profits urge Governor for state infusion to protect victim services

Hartford – [A letter signed by seven victim service organizations to Governor Lamont](#) urged his support for victims of crime by offsetting a temporary but significant loss of funding to crime victims in Connecticut. The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), administered in the state by the Connecticut Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services (OVS), supports victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, stalking, human trafficking, driving under the influence, homicide, and other crimes. Grantees of the fund who work on the ground tirelessly supporting victims will see a nearly thirty-five percent loss of funds at a time when the need for these critical services is increasing as a consequence of the pandemic. Collectively, the organizations provide essential services to most crime victims through the state.

VOCA funding, generated from federal criminal fines and fees, is at an all-time low due to an issue that redirected those fines and fees to the General Treasury for the past few years. In July, President Biden signed into law a measure that will correct this problem, and national experts expect the VOCA Fund should replenish in approximately two years. VOCA funds ensure victims have access to support, counseling, advocacy, and help to navigate the complex criminal justice system and provide systems of care for victims and survivors of crime, including crisis interventions in the immediate aftermath of the crime.

"Throughout the pandemic we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing survivors and a growing need for service, yet our ability to keep survivors safe is jeopardized by the temporary cut in federal VOCA funding," said Meghan Scanlon, President & CEO, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). "CCADV's 18 member organizations and Safe Connect rely on this critical funding to provide crisis response, court-based advocacy, coordination with law enforcement, and advocacy related to basic needs. A thirty-five percent cut in this federal funding will devastate Connecticut's domestic violence service system. While this is not a problem created by Connecticut, our state has the opportunity to keep victim service providers whole in the short-term and we look forward to partnering with Governor Lamont to identify a workable solution."

Citing the increase in sexual violence survivors reaching out for services, Beth Hamilton, Executive Director of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, commented, "We've seen

an increase in requests for services across the state as the pandemic has created circumstances that both increase sexual violence perpetration and the isolation that victims experience post-assault. The Alliance's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs, our post-conviction victim advocates, and our legal services team are the only people in the state who provide high quality, trauma-informed services to victims and survivors of sexual violence, and the loss of VOCA funding puts these services in jeopardy. We are working to support survivors with increasingly complex needs and a thirty five percent cut in funding will only compound survivors' trauma with fewer advocates, less access to hotline support, support groups, and assistance to navigate complex systems, which are all necessary to heal."

The letter requests the Governor make a one-time, temporary investment in services that will directly help reduce future abuse and crime through proactive services, advocacy, and innovative collaborations across public agencies and private organizations. It states "When victims do not receive the support they need, especially in children, the long-term effects of trauma manifest in several ways, including chronic physical and mental health issues, depression, suicide, substance use disorders, and difficulty maintaining employment. These issues, when not addressed, can have a greater economic burden on the state."

Krystal Rich, Executive Director of the Child Advocacy Center, agrees. "A cut in the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding will have an adverse impact on all victims of crime, only exacerbating the crisis caused by the continuing global pandemic. For our Child Advocacy Center (CAC) members, these cuts could mean a reduction in specialized mental health, medical and advocacy services and significant delays for child abuse victims needing this critical response. Each year our CACs provide a coordinated response to over 1800 children and their families and none of them should ever have to wait for the services they deserve."

"A cut in federal VOCA funding for victims of crimes will further exacerbate the mental health crisis we are experiencing in our state. Children who are exposed to crime require immediate intervention to help reduce their trauma response. A reduction in federal VOCA funding for the Village's Rapid Response program will result in hundreds of children not receiving this essential service," said Yvette Young, Associate Vice President of Programs and Advocacy at The Village for Families and Children.

Erin Williamson, Vice President of Global Program and Strategy for Love 146, added "If you or someone you love has ever been a victim of a crime you know how critical it is that they receive immediate support and services. Connecticut relies on the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) to fund the large majority of such services. Any cut in this funding will be detrimental for victims of all crimes. Like so many other organizations, a major reduction in funding is likely to result in service cuts, meaning children who have just experienced the horrific crime of child sex trafficking will have to wait for the specialized services they need and deserve."

Victim-centered organizations prioritize the needs of the victims, often helping them maintain their day-to-day lives amid great disruptions caused by the crime. The organizations say they are already at capacity and scrambling to help victims.

"The upcoming substantial reduction in federal funds from the Victims of Crime Act grant for 2022-2024 will significantly impact the ability of Survivors of Homicide, Inc. to adequately provide counseling, advocacy, and support groups to secondary survivors of homicide," said Director of Victim Services, Jessica Pizzano. "According to the 2019-2020 Uniform Crime Report

the rate of homicides in Connecticut rose 30% with 2020 having the highest number of homicides in the state since 1996. With this increase in homicides the anticipated cut in funding would be detrimental to our organization being able to support this new influx of survivors and will also impact those families we are currently serving."

"The significant cut Mothers Against Drunk Driving Connecticut anticipates in federal funding from the Victims of Crime Act grant (VOCA) for 2022-2024, will adversely affect the work we perform each and every day to end drunk driving, fight drugged driving, advocate for victims of these violent crimes and prevent underage drinking," said Bob Garguilo, Executive Director of the New England Region of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). "Connecticut has one of the highest percentages of fatal crashes involving alcohol and or drugs in the country, the anticipated loss of personnel as a result of the cuts will greatly reduce the number of new victims we can provide services to, while concurrently continuing our work with victims' families/survivors who had previously been impacted."

The letter to the Governor urged his support for additional funds to allow victims of crime to receive and access the quality services they deserve.

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The letter to Governor Ned Lamont was signed by seven victim advocate organizations. Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Connecticut Children's Alliance, Love 146, Mothers Against Drunk Driving Connecticut, Survivors of Homicide, Inc.

The link to the letter: <https://endsexualviolencect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/VOCA-Partner-Letter-FINAL-.pdf>