



{DATE}

Dear Senators Shelby, Shaheen, Blunt, Murray, Collins, Reed, Boozman, and Tester and Representatives Culberson, Serrano, Cole, DeLauro, Diaz-Balart, Price, Carter, and Roybal-Allard:

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF) is comprised of national, state, and local organizations working to end domestic violence and sexual assault. The {NUMBER} undersigned organizations join with the NTF to urge you to significantly increase funding for federal programs that address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. Domestic and sexual violence are life-threatening, pervasive crimes that affect millions of people every day. We implore you to build upon the incredibly-needed investments in the FY 18 funding bill.

We are experiencing a watershed moment in our country as survivors of gender-based violence are coming forward after living in the shadows for years, even decades. Our message to survivors must be clear: when you come forward for help and support, it will be available. Our nation has made such phenomenal progress in understanding and addressing violence against women because Congress committed to make an ongoing, annual investment. Victims of these degrading and life-threatening crimes rely on federally-funded direct services such as shelter, rape crisis services, legal assistance, counseling, and more. Communities across the country rely on federal prevention funding to protect our young people. Federal funding underpins our nation's improvements to the community-based response to domestic and sexual violence.

The recently-passed FY 18 funding bill provides significant and record investments to address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. Investments in VAWA provided increases in housing programs and rural services. FVPSA increases will help domestic violence programs across the country serve more survivors and begin to meet some of the desperate need on tribal lands. The increased VOCA fund cap will allow innovation and expansion of services for victims across the country, and the historic tribal funding stream will allow tribes to create and sustain urgently needed victim services. Increased RPE funding will support more essential rape prevention and education programs. The first ever funding stream for domestic violence rapid re-housing will begin to address survivors' housing needs. We are extremely grateful for these critical funds that will save and transform lives. We encourage Congress to continue investing in these vital programs.

Steady funding for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), along with sustained funding released from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), are beginning to address a portion of the gap in direct services. However, the overwhelming demand for services leaves many of these effective and essential programs short of the necessary funding to meet the need.

**VAWA, VOCA, and FVPSA are smart investments that have fueled our undeniable national progress in addressing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.**

Before the passage of VAWA, law enforcement often failed to conduct effective investigations and make arrests where appropriate, prosecutors often declined to file charges they could have proven, and courts often neglected or mishandled cases involving survivors and their families. With the passage of VAWA, the infusion of federal funds fostered unprecedented coordination between frontline stakeholders who respond to domestic violence and sexual assault crises – police officers, victim service providers, prosecutors, judges, and the criminal and civil justice systems. VAWA has elevated a national learning community, fostering innovation and promoting best practices. Additionally, federal VAWA funds encourage states to leverage local and state funds in the effort to end these pervasive crimes. VAWA's work is complemented by VOCA, which funds direct services to victims of all types of crime, including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, and FVPSA, which is our nation's only dedicated funding source for domestic violence shelters and direct service organizations.

**Return on Investment**

VAWA saves lives and taxpayer dollars. In its first six years alone, VAWA saved an estimated \$12.6 billion in net-averted costs.<sup>i</sup> Between VAWA's implementation in 1994 and 2011, serious victimization by an intimate partner declined by 72% for women and 64% for men.<sup>ii</sup> Studies have shown that an increase in the availability of legal services is associated with a decrease in intimate partner homicide.<sup>iii</sup> VAWA funds, particularly the ones supporting law enforcement, have been found to be a clear link to a reduction in rape and aggravated assault.<sup>iv</sup> Referring a victim to an advocate has been linked to an increased willingness to file a police report, keeping our communities safer.<sup>v</sup> A 2017 study highlighted the effectiveness of bystander intervention funded through VAWA's Rape Prevention and Education Program in reducing sexual assault perpetration.<sup>vi</sup> Domestic violence shelters, funded in significant part by FVPSA, have proven to be successful at addressing victims' urgent and long-term needs while helping victims protect themselves and their children.<sup>vii</sup> Additionally, the recent increased funding released via VOCA has allowed communities to foster innovation, reduce waitlists, increase vital services, hire staff to counsel more survivors, and expand rural services.

### **Desperate need remains**

Despite this progress, shelters, rape crisis centers, and other domestic and sexual violence service providers continue to face budget shortfalls. The national spotlight on these crimes is bringing more survivors out of the shadows and increasing requests for services. We applaud these survivors and want to address the increased demand for services. Unfortunately, many programs are forced to turn away victims who are desperate and have nowhere to go.

Almost one in five women in the United States has been the victim of rape or attempted rape, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A 2017 survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence shows that the nation's 1,300 sexual assault programs often lack sufficient resources to meet victims' most basic needs. Half of rape crisis centers have a waitlist for counseling services, and 40% have a waitlist of a month or more for prevention programs. In 2017, 28% of rape crisis centers saw an overall decrease in funds as well as a decrease in staffing – almost 80 advocate positions were either laid off or left unfilled.

The CDC found that more than 12 million individuals experience domestic violence every year. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence's 2016 Domestic Violence Counts Census, 72,959 victims of domestic violence received services in one day. However, on the same day, 11,991 requests for services went unmet due to a lack of funding and resources. Of those unmet requests, 66 percent were for safe housing. Also in 2016, domestic violence programs laid off approximately 1,200 staff positions. Most of the laid-off positions were direct service staff, including counselors, advocates, and children's advocates. Given reduced funding and staff, local programs had to reduce or completely eliminate countless services, including emergency shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling.

Additionally, Native women face some of the highest levels of violence of any group. Four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime and overall, which comes to more than 1.5 million American Indian and Alaska Native women. Over 90 percent of these victims have experienced that violence at the hands of a non-Indian intimate partner.

**The federal government funds critical programs at the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS) that reach into every community across the nation to provide safety, access to services, and justice for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The formula grant programs and national services include:**

- The STOP program (VAWA, DOJ), which improves the criminal justice and wider community response by allowing states and communities to develop coordinated community responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- The Sexual Assault Services Program (VAWA, DOJ), which is the federal government's only funding source dedicated to sexual assault services and rape crisis centers in every state;
- The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA, HHS), which is the federal government's only dedicated funding stream for domestic violence shelters and outreach programs;
- The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA, DOJ), which is a non-taxpayer fund which supports over 4,000 victim services agencies across the nation, including on tribal lands, to help victims deal with the immediate aftermath of a crime;
- The Rape Prevention and Education Program (RPE, HHS), which supports comprehensive sexual violence prevention in every state for communities and schools; and

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH, HHS), which receives approximately half a million contacts per year; StrongHearts Native Helpline (StrongHearts), which serves the specific cultural and jurisdictional needs of native victims of domestic and dating violence; and Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services (ADWAS), which is the only national service program for deaf and hearing-challenged survivors of domestic violence.

VAWA and related discretionary programs complement the state formula grants by propelling innovation and providing targeted responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. All the programs detailed in the attached chart work together to provide a comprehensive response to victims of violence. These include lifesaving legal services; funding for services in rural and remote areas; transitional housing programs to help victims rebuild their lives after violence and abuse; law enforcement improvements such as sexual assault response teams, initiatives to address the rape kit backlog, and homicide reduction initiatives; services for underserved victims, including disabled and elderly victims; funding to ensure compliance with the requirement of serving victims with limited English proficiency; programs aimed at children, youth, and college students; projects addressing courts and visitation; programs to respond to the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence on tribal lands; projects addressing violence in the workplace; a national domestic violence hotline; and prevention programs and public health responses to violence and abuse.

Additionally, we request a \$50 million set-aside for housing for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in the HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) homelessness assistance program. The funds would support rapid re-housing projects and supportive service projects providing coordinated entry and other critical activities to assist survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence.

Finally, we urge you to provide sufficient funding to ensure the timely processing of U visas and VAWA self-petitions for crime victims. Many immigrant victims face difficult challenges seeking assistance or escaping domestic violence, with abusers using immigration status to control their victims. Fortunately, Congress has recognized these risks and created the U visa and VAWA self-petition remedies. The U visa was established in 2000 for victims of certain designated crimes who suffered substantial physical or mental abuse, and are certified as helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity. Currently, there is a 3-year wait for crime victim visas just to be processed, and several years longer wait to get a visa due to the cap on U-visas. Under VAWA, certain types of immigrant victims who suffered domestic violence, child abuse, or elder abuse may "self-petition" for lawful permanent resident status. VAWA self-petitions also have long wait times and often take years to process. We are requesting sufficient funding to: 1) increase staffing of the Vermont Service Center Humanitarian Unit and the Nebraska Service Center U Visa Unit by at least 60 additional agents, 2) provide adequate resources to hire staff, and 3) increase resources to train adjudicators. These resources are critically needed to be able to address the timely processing of crime victims' applications that can mean the difference between leaving and recovering from abuse, and returning to abusive and exploitative relationships.

Each of these programs must receive sustained and increased funding to ensure that our communities can build on our years of progress and meet the needs of ALL victims.

**We ask the Committees to fully fund VAWA, FVPSA, and related programs, set the VOCA cap at an average of the past three years' deposits into the VOCA account and to maintain a tribal funding stream in VOCA, to create a housing set-aside for survivors, and to increase funding for the Vermont and Nebraska Service Centers. We oppose transferring funds from VOCA to fund other programs.**

We call on you to support increased funding for these vital programs. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Monica McLaughlin, National Network to End Domestic Violence at [mmclaughlin@nnev.org](mailto:mmclaughlin@nnev.org) or Terri Poore, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence at [terri@endsexualviolence.org](mailto:terri@endsexualviolence.org).

Thank you for your continued leadership in keeping victims safe and healthy. We know our successes could not be achieved without your support, and we are grateful for all that you do.

Sincerely,

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- <sup>i</sup> Clark, K.A., Biddle, A.K., & Martin, S.L. (2002). A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994., *Violence Against Women*, 8, 4: 417-428.
- <sup>ii</sup> *FY 2017: Congressional Justification*. (2016). United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/file/821736/download>; see also Catalano, S. (2013). Intimate partner violence: Attributes of victimization, 1992–2011 (NCJ 243300). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice (page 1).
- <sup>iii</sup> Reckdenwald, A., & Parker, K.K. (2010). Understanding gender-specific intimate partner homicide: A theoretical and domestic service-oriented approach. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38, 951-958.
- <sup>iv</sup> Rachel Lilley. *A Nationwide Assessment of Effects on Rape and Assault*, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801208329146?journalCode=vawa>
- <sup>v</sup> Campbell, R. (2006). Rape survivors' experiences with the legal and medical system: Do rape victim advocates make a difference? *Violence Against Women*, 12: 30-45.
- <sup>vi</sup> Coker, Anne, et al., *RCT Testing Bystander Effectiveness to Reduce Violence*, available at [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(17\)30027-2/fulltext](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(17)30027-2/fulltext).
- <sup>vii</sup> Lyon, E., Lane S. (2009), *Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences*; National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and UConn School of Social Work, available at <http://www.vawnet.org>.