# INSERT YOUR LETTER HEAD

The Honorable FIRST NAME LAST NAME

United States Senate/U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20510/20515

DATE

Dear Representative/Senator:

On behalf of the ORGANIZATION and the X NUMBER victims served in COUNTY/DISTRICT/REGION each year, we are writing to urge you to request full funding for lifesaving federal programs, including the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), as well as requesting a release $2.6 billion from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund in the FY18 Appropriations bills.

High profile cases of sexual assault and domestic violence, as well as the spotlight on our campuses and in our military, have focused unprecedented attention on these crimes, have led to more survivors coming forward for services, and have encouraged our nation to redouble its efforts to prevent and end these degrading and life-threatening injustices. Many programs continue to struggle to meet the needs of victims, leaving more victims in life-threatening situations, without recovery support, and with nowhere to turn for help. Now is precisely the time to affirm our collective commitment to end domestic violence and sexual assault by increasing the investments in these vital federal programs.

In 2015, across the U.S.:

* 1/3 of rape crisis centers had to decrease hours of service for individual and/or group counseling, and almost 1/2 have a waiting list for general counseling services
* 1/3 of rape crisis center had two or less full time staff responding to the direct services needs of survivors of sexual assault
* 45% experienced an overall decrease in funding over the past year

As you prepare to submit funding requests to the Appropriations Committee, we urge you to support full funding for all FVPSA, VAWA, VOCA, and related programs. We have highlighted the following programs as key priorities for FY18.

With the threat of sequestration looming over the FY18 budget, we urge Congress to refrain from reductions in funding for non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs and to work to replace the scheduled sequestration cuts through a package that is balanced—both in how such relief is paid for and how it is applied to defense and NDD programs.

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

**Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) – $175 million 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 are addressing both the urgent safety needs and long-term needs of victims, including economic stability. Despite FVPSA’s great promise, community-based domestic violence programs report that at current funding levels they cannot meet the overwhelming demand for services. In 2014, domestic violence programs funded by the Family Violence Prevention & Services Act (FVPSA) provided shelter and nonresidential services to approximately 1.3 million victims. However, due to lack of capacity, an additional 196,467 requests for shelter went unmet. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) DV Counts Census found that in just one day during 2016, while more than 72,959 victims of domestic violence received services, 11,991 requests for services went unmet, largely due to lack of funding. Of those unmet requests, 66% were for safe housing. We urge you to request $175 million for FVPSA to address this dangerous gap in services.

**Rape Prevention and Education (CDC) – $50 million with at least $5.6 million increase in program funds**

The Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) formula grants, administered by the CDC Injury Center, provide essential funding to states and territories to support rape prevention and education programs conducted by rape crisis centers, state sexual assault coalitions, and other public agencies and private nonprofit entities. CDC data of RPE- funded programs shows that in 2013, some 160,000 professionals were trained in sexual violence issues and more than 2 million young people participated in rape prevention programs. The RPE program prepares everyday people to become heroes, getting involved in the fight against sexual violence and creating safer communities by engaging boys and men as partners; supporting multidisciplinary research collaborations; fostering cross-cultural approaches to prevention; and promoting healthy, non-violent social norms, attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices. We know that RPE is working.Building on the success of the innovative Green Dot bystander intervention campaign on campuses, Kentucky RPE programs expanded into high schools. A 5-year randomized intervention trial funded by the CDC found a more than 50% reduction in the self-reported frequency of sexual violence perpetration by students at schools that received the Green Dot training. However, a 2016 survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) revealed that 16% of rape crisis centers had a waiting list for prevention programs. Programs cannot meet the increased demand, especially from campuses. If our children are to face a future free from sexual violence, RPE must be fully funded at $50 million with at least $5.6 million in additional program funds to meet the need and implement evidence-based strategies.

**DELTA (CDC) – $6 million funding request**

The Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) program at CDC is the only dedicated federal funding source for the primary prevention of domestic violence. In approximately 50 communities across the nation, the DELTA program works to identify effective strategies for preventing first-time perpetration and first-time victimization of domestic violence. Through the use of evidence-supported initiatives, including social change and public health strategies, DELTA states have piloted and evaluated a range of programs, designed to promote safety and respect across communities. The growing evidence base shows that such strategies have the potential to reduce multiple forms of violence. Over the history of the program, 16 states have been able to participate as DELTA projects. Preliminary evaluation results show a growing body of evidence that supports this work, indicating that domestic violence and dating violence rates can be decreased over time with the implementation of DELTA programming. The work being done with multi-level strategies (individual, relationship, community and societal strategies) focuses on changing social norms and promoting behaviors that support healthy relationships. An increase in funding will enable the DELTA program to expand to additional states and communities, and will also provide the opportunities for communities to leverage additional funding. If increased funding is not available, DELTA should minimally be funded at its $6 million authorization level.

**Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant – $7 million set-aside for sexual assault services and rape prevention**

The Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHSBG) administered by the CDC allows states, territories and tribes to address their own unique public health challenges with innovative and community-driven methods. The Public Health Service Act of 2010 included a guaranteed $7 million minimum set-aside to support direct services to victims of sexual assault and to prevent rape. States and communities rely on the set-aside to fund critical sexual assault services and prevention work. The PHHSBG should be funded with the $7 million set aside to maintain services for victims.

**Remaining LHHS programs**

Additionally, we urge you to request funding for the National Domestic Violence Hotline (ACF) and the Violence Against Women Health program (Office on Women’s Health).

**Commerce, Justice, Science – Department of Justice**

**VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT (VOCA) FUNDING**

**Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) –$2.6 billion release request**

VOCA uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund for several programs that serve victims of crime, including state formula victim assistance grants. These funds, which are generated by 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.

The balance in the Crime Victims Fund is more than enough to maintain increased VOCA funding releases without jeopardizing the Fund's future sustainability. We urge you to request that the committee set the annual VOCA funding release level at no less than the average amount deposited into the Fund over the three previous fiscal years, which is approximately $2.6 billion for fiscal year 2018.

The FY 16 Appropriations bill transferred VOCA funds to pay for VAWA programs. We oppose VOCA funds being transferred to other CJS accounts, as this reduces vital funding for direct victim services.

We urge you to request $2.6 billion from the VOCA fund in FY18 to address the urgent needs of victims of crime. We urge you to request that Appropriators do not transfer funds from VOCA to fund other programs within CJS.

Additionally, we urge you to request funding to establish a federal funding stream from VOCA for Tribes. Individuals on tribal lands experience disproportionately high rates of domestic and sexual violence and desperately need funding for victim services.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA) and related programs CJS Funding**

**Sexual Assault Services Program – $40 million funding request**

The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) was authorized in VAWA 2005 as the first federal funding stream dedicated to the provision of direct services to victims of sexual violence. The Office on Violence Against Women’s most recent report to Congress found that 40,000 survivors annually received services through SASP; 200 advocates and counselors were funded at local programs; and 60,000 hotline calls were answered. Across the country, SASP funds support the critical services adult and child victims need most, including counseling, accompaniment through medical and legal processes, and support for underserved populations. 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. According to a 2016 survey by NAESV, more than half of these programs have a waiting list for counseling services and more than 1/3 have a waiting list for support groups. We urge you to request $40 million for SASP to support local rape crisis centers.

**VAWA STOP Program – $222 million funding request**

VAWA’s Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors (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 collaborative responses help hundreds of thousands of victims find safety and receive services, while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. As the foundational VAWA program, STOP funds are awarded to every state and territory through a formula-based system. States use STOP funding to train law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts to improve the system-wide response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. 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 helps survivors obtain orders of protection and promote the prosecution of domestic and sexual violence cases. A 2014 report to Congress showed that the STOP grant program that year helped 431,244 victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking; funded more than 2,200 staff; and provided professional training for more than 200,000 criminal justice system professionals. Increased investment in STOP will allow communities to expand lifesaving homicide reduction efforts, continue to improve law enforcement and prosecution responses, and serve additional victims. We urge you to request $222 million to support these essential, comprehensive services.

**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. Legal services are also vital to support survivors of sexual assault in civil matters. 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, of all women who reported needing legal services, 64% 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. We urge you to request $57 million for this program to support legal help for victims.

**Rural Grant program – $50 million funding request**

Victims in rural areas face unique barriers, including lack of access to child care, legal services, and public transportation; under-resourced law enforcement; and a lack of services. 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 enormous need and despite a number of states becoming newly eligible through the most recent VAWA reauthorization. We urge you to request $50 million for this program.

**Transitional Housing program – $35 million funding request**

This vital VAWA program helps communities in every state give victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking a safe place to begin to rebuild their shattered lives. On just one day in 2015, 40,302 adults and children were housed in domestic violence transitional housing programs. On the same day, however, 7,728 requests for emergency shelter or transitional housing were denied due to a lack of capacity. The extreme dearth nationwide of affordable housing produces a situation where many victims of domestic violence must return to their abusers because they cannot find stable housing, while others are forced into homelessness. Increased investment in the Transitional Housing program will allow more communities ensure that victims do not have to make these unfathomable choices. We urge you to request $35 million for this program.

**Grants to Encourage Arrest (GTEAP) – $73 million funding request**

The GTEAP program encourages state, local, and tribal governments and courts to treat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking as serious violations of criminal law requiring the coordinated involvement of the entire criminal justice system. The program supports homicide reduction initiatives designed to address the urgent problem of abuse victims being murdered, especially those in escalating domestic violence situations. Additionally, the reauthorization of VAWA in 2013 increased GTEAP’s focus on improving the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault. Increased investment in GTEAP at $73 million will allow communities to continue this life-saving work.

**Remaining VAWA and related programs – full funding (see chart)**

All VAWA and related programs work together to provide a comprehensive response to victims of violence. These include life-saving services to underserved victims including victims with disabilities and elderly victims; programs aimed at children, youth, and college students; projects addressing courts and visitation; response to the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence on tribal lands; projects addressing violence in the workplace; and prevention programs and public health responses to violence and abuse. 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.

Thank you for your continued support of victims in STATE. Please feel free to contact INSERT CONTACT DETAILS if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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