

Support Crime Victims – Invest in Victim Services

Increase in State Funds Essential to Avoid Deep Cuts in Services

Devastating federal funding cuts mean reduced access to support for crime victims. A massive cut in federal funding for state grants through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) means *5,000 fewer crime victims will receive services from Iowa programs in the new fiscal year (FY22) and more than 23,000 fewer crime victims will be served the following year (FY23).*

At least \$7.5 million (\$2.5 m increase) in state funds for crime victims services needed NOW. Iowa crime victims have long needed additional state funds to address significant unmet needs, but an increase of at least \$2.5 million in state funds this year will protect against an immediate reduction in crime victim services. Crime victim service providers never stopped supporting victims throughout the pandemic, but service delivery continues to be more challenging and costly. COVID introduced a crisis within the crisis of gender violence. Victims have more severe and comprehensive needs for food, housing, and employment in addition to enhanced trauma from violence they experienced from being isolated. Importantly, before COVID, local programs recruited volunteers to assist with supporting survivors and raised private funds to boost budgets- but since, these additional supports have vanished.

Every crime victim deserves support & access to services: Crime victims face numerous challenges recovering from harm. Access to crisis response and stabilizing services should not be one of them. It is essential to ensure sustainable funding for all crime victims and for funding to support access to services meeting the diverse needs of survivors. Services to support families impacted by homicide and culturally specific services will be disproportionately impacted by funding cuts.

Supporting crime victim should not be dismissed as a federal problem. It takes all of us. Fewer staff means fewer services available to crime victims and that limits access to services and options for safety in every community. Regardless of the amount of federal funding Iowa receives, state funds are essential to maintaining consistent service delivery to crime victims. Federal funds enhance program capacity for providing services, *but state funds pay for staff and enable programs to operate.* Local programs raise private funds and recruit volunteers to help but cannot keep up with the demand for services. In 2017, Iowa reduced state funding for victim services by 25% and legislators cited the robust federal funds Iowa receives as rationale for the cut. As a result, our service provider network is as lean as possible. Iowa legislators simply cannot say to crime victims- ‘this is not our problem.’

BACKGROUND: Together, state and federal funds support Iowa programs serving victims of violent crime. Federal funds increase the capacity of programs to provide more comprehensive services but state funds support staff and operational costs. Currently, federal VOCA grants are the largest source of funds supporting crime victim services.

However, a devastating 35% cut in federal funding in state grants through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) means a \$6 million decrease in federal victim services funds to Iowa this year. Iowa crime victims have long needed more state resources to address significant unmet need, but without an increase of at least \$2.5 million in state funds, access to crime victim services will be severely reduced. The Iowa Attorney General estimates cuts to victim service providers mean 5,000 fewer crime victims will receive services in the upcoming fiscal year and more than 23,000 fewer victims served the following year.

Federal VOCA funds greatly expanded the reach of Iowa victim service programs but this massive funding cut will fall hardest on small programs with limited staff but large or concentrated service areas, e.g., programs supporting families of homicide victims, culturally specific programs offering targeted services to victims in communities of color, and targeted outreach in rural Iowa. Importantly, it reduces the capacity for all programs to offer post-crisis response services which enhance long-term stability to victims of violent crime.

March 29, 2021