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December 16, 2020

Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States Capitol
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C., 20515

Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Capitol
United States Senate
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McConnell,

I am calling on House and Senate leadership to ensure that issues impacting Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) programs are rectified and that these programs are adequately funded as part of any end-of-year spending bill. We cannot allow funding cuts for our most vulnerable populations during this very volatile time.

The Crime Victims Fund (CVF) was created as part of VOCA to help states compensate and assist victims of violent crime, sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. Grantees receiving CVF funds include state-run and private organizations that provide services to help women and men, children, and families who have been victims of these terrible crimes. Due to COVID-19 and the resulting economic downturn, donations and fundraising opportunities have slowed, with 49% of domestic violence organizations nationwide – including 54% of rural programs – stating they have less than 90 days of operating revenues.

Unlike other government funds, the CVF does not receive annual appropriation of taxpayer dollars; instead, funds come from criminal fines and penalties. However, Department of Justice (DOJ) policies and statutory barriers in VOCA have led to a drastic reduction in deposits. For example, although criminal fines are deposited in the CVF, penalties from deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements are not. This issue unfairly undercuts victims based solely on how DOJ seeks to resolve a criminal case. I applaud previous efforts by the House to amend VOCA to allow penalties from these agreements to be deposited into the CVF, and I encourage leadership to take up those efforts again now.

The organizations providing these critical victim services in our communities are also facing potential funding cuts from Congress. The CVF obligation cap – the money it can distribute to support victims and survivors – has faced cuts in back-to-back fiscal years (FYs), with the cap dropping from \$4.4 billion in FY18 to \$2.6 billion in FY20. That amounts to a 40% cut in available victim services grants. Recently, the Senate Appropriations Committee unveiled legislation that would cut the CVF cap by another \$1.1 billion, which would leave only \$1.5 billion to support victims and survivors. It is unconscionable these cuts are being pursued during one of the worst economic recessions and a global health pandemic.

That is why I implore you to use these end-of-year negotiations to expand deposits that may be made to the CVF and ensure the CVF obligation cap is not cut. I have heard from many advocates in my state about the catastrophic impact not passing this reform would have, including service reductions, staff layoffs, and diminished access to emergency housing, legal assistance, jobs, and childcare. Cuts to VOCA would have a significant negative impact on our ability to respond to the needs of victims of sexual abuse and violence during this very difficult time.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress