

Send Congress a Message

Increase Victim Assistance Allocation in the VOCA Fund

Economic Crisis Impacts Victims Services

The victim service providers in our communities are struggling to respond to the high volume of requests from victims of crime in need of compensation, counseling and assistance. These providers are experiencing unprecedented cuts in federal, state and county budgets as well as sharp declines in foundation grants, private donations and volunteer recruitment.

Making ends meet in the face of skyrocketing operating costs and a free falling economy is forcing many programs to create waiting lists for services, cut back on services, reduce hours and lay off staff. As a consequence, victims and their families are not able to obtain all the necessary help to cope with the trauma and aftermath of crime.

Congress Resists Release of Funds to Help Crime Victims

Congress has the ability and non-taxpayer resources to help stabilize victim assistance funding at a time when the need is never more urgent.

Congress is sitting on close to \$2 billion in the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund which was created more than two decades ago solely to assist crime victims. The Fund consists of fines and penalties collected from federal offenders, not taxpayers. However, in recent years Congress has limited the amount released from the Fund, despite a large and growing surplus.

Pennsylvania Victim Service Providers Seek Increase

Pennsylvania’s network of victim service providers is seeking a one-time increase in the VOCA Fund cap to \$1 billion in the 2009 federal budget. The need is urgent; the increase is critical.

You Can Help Secure Critically Needed Funding

Now more than ever, Congress needs to hear from their constituents on behalf of crime victims and service providers in their communities.

The resources provided here can help you frame your message, mobilize your community, and communicate with your members of Congress.

PLEASE ACT NOW – Congress only has until the end of March to pass the 2009 Budget.

- [More Information About the VOCA Fund](#)
- [Contact Your Members of Congress](#)
- [Schedule Congressional Meetings](#)
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- [Recruit Congressional Victim’s Rights Caucus Members](#)
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- [Local Victim Services Resources](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund

What Is the VOCA Fund?

Congress created this Fund under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 to provide state assistance grants for compensation and free services to help victims and their families cope with the trauma and aftermath of crime.

Where Does the Money Come From?

Not one taxpayer dollar goes into the VOCA Fund – it is 100% sustained by fines and penalties imposed on offenders of federal crimes. Some recent substantial fines include:

- 2009: Sharp Corp., price-fixing, \$120 million
 LG Display, price-fixing, \$400 million
 Siemens AG, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, \$448 million
- 2008: Air France, price-fixing, \$210 million, paying in installments
 KLM, price-fixing, \$140 million, paying in installments
 Japan Airlines International, price-fixing, \$110 million
- 2007: British Airways, price-fixing, \$300 million, fully paid
 Korean Air Lines, price-fixing, \$300 million, paying in installments
- 2006: Samsung Electronics, price-fixing, \$300 million, paying in installments
 Serono Laboratories, illegal marketing, \$132 million, paid
 Schering-Plough, illegal marketing, \$180 million, paid
- 2005: KPMG, tax shelter fraud case, \$128 million, paid
 Hynix Semiconductors, price-fixing, \$185 million, paying in installments
 Infineon Semiconductors, price-fixing, \$160 million, paying in installments

Does the Fund Help Victims of All Types of Crime?

The Fund pays for services to victims of every type of crime. Each year, 4,400 local service providers throughout the U.S. rely on the Fund to offer support and assistance to close to 4.1 million victims and their families. In Pennsylvania, 124 agencies provided services to 141,410 victims of crime. Providers include rape crisis centers, domestic violence programs and shelters, prosecutor- and law-enforcement-based programs, child advocacy centers, drunk driving victim and homicide survivor support groups, etc.

How Much Money Is in the Fund?

The current balance totals approximately \$1.9 billion dollars and the federal government expects to collect an additional \$710 million in 2009.

What Other Programs Does the Fund Support?

Throughout the years, Congress has tapped the Fund to also authorize annual allocations for the Children’s Justice Act, the U.S. Attorneys Victim Witness program, FBI Victim Specialists, the Victim Notification System, and training and technical assistance programs. The Fund also includes a \$50 million Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve.

Frequently Asked Questions

Federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund

How Is the Fund Distributed?

Each year in the federal budget, Congress sets the amount to be released from the Fund. Monies then are distributed based on a formula that allocates funds to states for victim assistance **only after all the other programs noted on the previous page receive their funding**. "Leftovers" don't even begin to meet the needs of crime victims.

Why Has Funding Decreased for State Assistance Grants?

In 2000, Congress placed a cap (limit) on the amount released from the VOCA Fund in order to ensure that a stable level of funding remains available for use to fund crime victim programs in future years. However, since 2004, the cap on the amount released has been lower than the amount of deposits into the Fund, thereby holding back more than \$1.430 billion collected for the Fund.

Despite the substantial surpluses in the VOCA Fund, the amount released has dwindled, then been cut dramatically. In 2008 the cap on funds released was decreased by \$35 million – from \$625 million in 2007 to \$590 million in 2008 – while the amount of deposits into the fund was \$1.017 billion dollars just in 2008.

What Is the Impact of Cuts on Pennsylvania Victim Services?

Since 2006, the loss of \$6.723 million in grants from the Fund to Pennsylvania has put an enormous strain on providers, forcing 20% to implement waiting lists for services; 31% to eliminate staff; and 16.5% to discontinue programs altogether.

What Is the Impact of Cuts on Pennsylvania Crime Victims?

In responding to a recent statewide survey, Pennsylvania victim service providers say that the cuts are likely to:

- "force victims to pursue pro se representation on their own, which can be overwhelming when facing the legal and judicial systems without an advocate or representation"
- "jeopardize the client's safety and fair treatment in court"
- "impede on their ability to heal because their needs are not being met"
- "increase the potential for lethality with the likelihood of client returning to a dangerous situation"
- "increase likelihood of client and children ending up homeless"
- "reduce resiliency of crime victims"
- "result in one more person is left 'out in the cold' without help to navigate the difficult criminal justice system"

Constituent Advocacy

Contact Members of Congress About VOCA

Direct All Communications to DC Offices

Most Members of Congress and their staff advise that communications on legislative, policy, and funding issues should be directed to their D.C. offices. (The district offices typically handle "case work," i.e., constituent problems with veterans' benefits, IRS claims, etc., or municipal issues.)

Most Effective Methods of Contact

1. Electronic Correspondence

Most of the PA Congressional Delegation recommends using their Web sites to electronically communicate on issues. Staff say this is the quickest way to reach your House or Senate Member and to receive a response. When you click on "contact information" you'll have the option of composing an electronic message.

Please Note: You won't be able to send attachments with your message. If attachments are necessary, it's okay to call the DC office and ask for a specific staff email address.

2. Fax

This is another option if you have attachments or would prefer not to use electronic correspondence.

3. Phone

Unless you are calling with a very short message (E.g., Raise the VOCA cap to \$1 billion), telephone calls aren't the most efficient or effective. Staff do not have time to fully document the specifics of each call, other than name, date, time, and a few words about the issue. They probably will ask you to send something in writing.

4. Mail

This is the least effective and timely way to communicate with your House or Senate Members in their DC offices. All mail takes about 3-6 weeks to reach the Member because of screening precautions.

Furthermore, a number of Members are now moving to paperless offices and are scanning and then shredding paper mail.

Titles/Salutations

In correspondence, Members of the U.S. House of Representatives should be addressed as:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives

Members of the U.S. Senate should be addressed as:

The Honorable _____
United State Senator

Proper salutation in correspondence:

Dear Congressman or Congresswoman or Dear Senator

[Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation Contact Information](#)

Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation Contact Information

U.S. Senators	Electronic Correspondence via their Web site	DC Office Numbers	DC Office Address	Preferred Method of Contact
Arlen Specter (R – PA)	http://specter.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Contact.ContactForm	PHONE: 202-224-4254 FAX: 202-228-1229	711 Hart Building, Washington, D.C. 20510	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Robert P. Casey (D – PA)	http://casey.senate.gov/contact/	PHONE: 202-224-6324 FAX: 202-228-0604	383 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
U.S. House Members	Electronic Correspondence via their Web site	DC Office Numbers	DC Office Address	Preferred Method of Contact
Jason Altmire (D – Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, Mercer)	https://forms.house.gov/altmire/webforms/issue_subscribe.htm	PHONE: 202-225-2565 FAX: 202-226-2274	332 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3804	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Robert A. Brady (D – Delaware, Philadelphia)	http://www.house.gov/formrobertbrady/issue.htm	PHONE: 202-225-4731 FAX: 202-225-0088	206 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3801	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Christopher Carney (D – Bedford, Lackawanna, Luzerne)	http://www.carney.house.gov/contact.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-3731 FAX: 202-225-9594	416 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3810	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Kathy Dahlkemper (D – Butler, Crawford, Erie, Mercer, Venango, Warren)	https://forms.house.gov/dahlkemper/contact-form.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-5406 FAX: 202-225-3103	516 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3803	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Charles Dent (R – Berks, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton)	http://dent.house.gov/contact.aspx	PHONE: 202-225-6411 FAX: 202-226-0778	1009 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3815	?
Michael F. Doyle (D – Allegheny)	http://doyle.house.gov/email_mike.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-2135 FAX: 202-225-3084	401 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3814	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Chaka Fattah (D – Philadelphia)	http://fattah.house.gov/?sectionid=8&sectiontree=8	PHONE: 202-225-4001 FAX: 202-225-5392	2301 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3802	Convenience of Constituent
Jim Gerlach (R – Berks, Chester, Lehigh, Montgomery)	https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-4315 FAX: 202-225-8440	308 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3806	Phone
Tim Holden (D – Berks, Dauphin, Lebanon, Perry, Schuylkill)	http://holden.house.gov/contactform_zipcheck.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-5546 FAX: 202-226-0996	2417 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3817	Electronic Correspondence via Web site

Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation Contact Information

U.S. House Members	Electronic Correspondence via their Web site	DC Office Numbers	DC Office Address	Preferred Method of Contact
Paul E. Kanjorski (D – Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe)	http://kanjorski.house.gov/?option=com_content&task=view&id=2&Itemid=	PHONE: 202-225-6511 FAX: 202-225-0764	2188 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3811	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Patrick Murphy (D – Bucks)	http://www.patrickmurphy.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=86	PHONE: 202-225-4276 FAX: 202-225-9511	1609 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3808	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Tim Murphy (R – Allegheny, Beaver, Washington, Westmoreland)	http://murphy.house.gov/Contact/zipauth.htm	PHONE: 202-225-2301 FAX: 202-225-1844	322 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3818	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
John P. Murtha (D – Allegheny, Armstrong, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland)	https://forms.house.gov/murtha/IMA/issue_subscribe.htm	PHONE: 202-225-2065 FAX: 202-225-5709	2423 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3812	Fax or Mail only
Joseph R. Pitts (R – Berks, Chester, Lancaster)	http://www.house.gov/pitts/contact.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-2411 FAX: 202-225-2013	420 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3816	?
Todd R. Platts (R – Adams, Cumberland, York)	http://www.house.gov/platts/email.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-5836 FAX: 202-226-1000	2455 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3819	Convenience of Constituent
Bill Schuster (R – Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Clearfield, Cumberland, Fayette, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Juniata, Mifflin, Perry, Somerset, West Moreland)	http://www.house.gov/shuster/zipauth.htm	PHONE: 202-225-2431 FAX: 202-225-2486	204 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3809	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Allyson Schwartz (D – Montgomery)	http://schwartz.house.gov/issue_subscribe.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-6111 FAX: 202-226-0611	330 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3813	Electronic Correspondence via Web site
Joe Sestak (D – Chester, Delaware, Montgomery)	http://sestak.house.gov/IMA/issue_subscribe.htm	PHONE: 202-225-2011 FAX: 202-226-0280	1022 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3807	Electronic Correspondence via Web site

Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation Contact Information

U.S. House Members	Electronic Correspondence via their Web site	DC Office Numbers	DC Office Address	Preferred Method of Contact
Glenn Thompson (R – Cameron, Centre, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Crawford, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lycoming, McKean, Mifflin, Potter, Tioga, Venango, Warren)	https://forms.house.gov/thompson/contact-form.shtml	PHONE: 202-225-5121 FAX: 202-225-5796	124 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-3805	Electronic Correspondence via Web site

Do Your Homework

Schedule Congressional and Legislative Meetings

The amount of time that you have with your members of Congress or legislators will be limited so you want to be prepared to make the most of it! The following tips will help you have a successful meeting.

- **Do your research on each member of Congress or legislator before you meet.** Know their history, what issues they prioritize, how long they have been members of Congress, what committees they serve on.
- **Bring a group!** The purpose of the meeting is to help your members of Congress or legislators understand the importance of your issues and the need for their support. If possible, organize a group of community partners – your Board members, law enforcement, nurses or medical providers, faith leaders, etc. – who can describe the role of funding or the impact of the issue within your community. Keep the group small, no more than four or five people, and plan ahead so that everyone understands the focus of the meeting and is prepared to contribute to the discussion.
Note: You may want to consider bringing a survivor or family member of a victim along; however, be sure that this individual is comfortable and ready to share their story.
- **Bring materials to support your request.** Do not go empty-handed! Take these things with you: program brochures, a written letter stating your requests, data related to the issue and relevant to your district, program newsletters, position papers or fact sheets, stories and statistics from your community, and your business card. Bring enough materials for staff, too! If you don't know how many to bring, call to inquire.
- **Ask for what you want and don't let them sit on the fence.** Be clear about what you're asking of them – e.g., a one-time increase of \$1 billion in the VOCA cap and be sure to actually ask for it. "Will you request a one-time increase in the VOCA cap of \$1 billion for local victim services?" If they respond vaguely or generally, try to draw them out and get them to give a concrete answer. Don't be argumentative or hostile, but do be persistent.
- **Follow up.** After every meeting, send a "thank you" letter that summarizes your understanding of what they agreed to do and thanks them for their work to help victims. Be sure to include any information or materials that you promised during the meeting. Remind them that you are available as a resource. Send a separate "thank you" letter to their staff and make a point to keep in touch with them.
- **Don't be a stranger!** Call your members of Congress or legislators and invite them to your program's events. Add them to your mailing list. Subscribe to their mailing lists. If your program has a significant success or your community has experienced a crime-related fatality, call or write to tell them about it. Stay in touch and pay attention to your ongoing relationships with your members of Congress or legislators so that you are not calling them only in a crisis.

Lobbying Tip

Invite your Legislators to Visit Your Program

Having your members of Congress or legislators come to visit your program site is likely the most effective lobbying strategy – and essential to building good relationships with them. They need to come to your program to see what and how and where you operate. Visiting your site is also crucial for instilling in them the value of your program and how funding translates to actual services for victims in their district. Legislators consistently report that site visits are an extremely positive and influential experience.

Plan and Coordinate

Host Congressional and Legislative Events

One of the most effective ways to get to know your members of Congress or legislators is to host an event. This will provide an opportunity for them to visit your program and come away with a better appreciation of the critical need for victims services support.

The following points will provide a framework:

- **Do your research on each member of Congress or legislator.** When you schedule your event – a breakfast, lunch, general open house, or community forum – make sure that you do it on a day when your members of Congress or legislators are in their home district and are able to participate.
- **Host an event that will provide information to members of Congress or legislators.** Invite victims, staff, volunteers, or board members to speak. Use every appropriate opportunity to showcase your program and the services it provides. Show clearly how you help people in the community – not just in terms of providing crisis services, but also through prevention education, children’s programs, etc.
- **Send out a personalized invitation far enough in advance to get your event on their schedule, and call to follow-up.** Don’t be disappointed if your members of Congress or legislators send staff in their place. Show them the same respect and attention you would devote to their boss. If your staff, board members, or volunteers have personal relationships with legislators, ask them to write a personal note or make a call to follow-up on your invitation.
- **Plan your event so as not to waste time.** Provide some time for questions, a tour of your facility (if appropriate), and a presentation. Decide in advance what kind of information you want to convey and try to stick to a schedule. Members of Congress or legislators are usually very busy and appreciate knowing how long you expect them to be there.
- **A word about politics – be careful.** We need everyone’s good will, Democrats and Republicans alike. In many communities, elected officials of different parties know each other and work well together for the benefit of their community. In others, they don’t. In many areas of the state, members of one party or another predominate. If you have a solidly entrenched member of one party who is not likely to be defeated, inviting her/his opponent at the same time is probably not a good idea. Use common sense. You have a good enough feel for your community to know who you should or should not invite. You may also want to arrange for more individualized meetings with some legislators or candidates, who are unable to make your events. Don’t wait until the next time you host an event to invite them. Instead, arrange a time when it’s convenient for them to visit your program.
- **By the same token, feel free to invite candidates from both parties if your events are being held in an election year and you have an open seat in your area.**
- **If you have a newly-elected member, the sooner you make contact after the election, the better.**

Become a Recruiter

The Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus

Ask your member of Congress to join the Caucus.

Local programs may want to use the information below in meetings with their members of Congress, to make them aware of the Caucus and encourage them to join. Before you ask your member of Congress, be sure to check and see whether he or she is already a member of the Caucus! Go to <http://vrc.poe.house.gov/Membership/>.

Currently, the PA Reps already on the Caucus are Carney, Doyle, Holden, and Platts.

The bipartisan Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus was formed in 2005 by Rep. Ted Poe (R, TX-02) and Rep. Jim Costa (D, CA-20), who today serve as its co-chairs.

The mission of the Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus is to elevate crime victim issues in Congress in a bipartisan manner without infringing on the rights of the accused, and to represent and to advocate before the Administration and within Congress on behalf of crime victims.

The Caucus has three main goals:

- To represent crime victims in the United States through the bipartisan introduction of legislation that reflects their interests, rights, and needs.
- To provide an ongoing forum for dialog between the Congress and national victim assistance organizations to enhance mutual education, legislative advocacy and initiatives that promote justice for all, including crime victims.
- To seek opportunities for public education initiatives to help people in America understand the impact of crime on victims, and to encourage their involvement in crime prevention, victim assistance, and community safety.

The Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus has already proven to be an effective leader in advocating for crime victims. Since founded in 2005, the Caucus has taken a leading role in protecting programs that provide critical financial support for victim services throughout the nation, including the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The Caucus was also instrumental in the enactment of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 and has co-sponsored resolutions recognizing National Crime Victims' Rights Week, National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, National Stalking Awareness Month, National Peace Officers' Memorial Day, and National Remembrance for Murder Victims.

For more information or to join the Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus, please contact Tabatha Mansfield at (202) 225-6565 or Tabatha.Mansfield@mail.house.gov.

To subscribe to the Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus' eNewsletter, please sign-up at <http://vrc.poe.house.gov>.

Sample Resolution

Resolution for County Commissioners

A Resolution

Recommending to the Congress of the United States that the cap on the Crime Victims Fund be raised to one billion dollars and that the increase in funds be allocated entirely to State Victim Assistance Grants.

WHEREAS, The Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (Public Law 98-473, 42 U.S.C. § 10601 et seq. (a.k.a. "VOCA") established the Crime Victims Fund, which is one of the main sources of money and support for crime victims and crime victims services; and

WHEREAS, All funds placed in the Crime Victims Fund are derived from federal criminal offenders via fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalty fees, and special assessments collected by the United States Attorneys' Offices, the United States courts, and the Bureau of Prisons, and do not rely on any tax-generated revenues; and

WHEREAS, The Crime Victims Fund provides critical funding for formula grants to states for victim compensation and victim assistance, in addition to funds for the Children's Justice Act, the Victim Notification System, training and technical assistance, and federal victim assistance within the United States Attorneys' Offices and FBI; and

WHEREAS, State victim compensation programs pay directly for medical care, counseling, lost wages, funerals, and other out-of-pocket expenses for victims of crimes including domestic violence, child abuse, rape, and homicide; and

WHEREAS, State victim assistance grantee programs provide critical services to victims of crime, including crisis intervention, counseling, emergency shelter, child care, and emergency transportation; and

WHEREAS, States may utilize compensation grants and victim assistance grants over a four-year period, thus enabling them to plan and manage the distribution of funds over time; and

WHEREAS, In Pennsylvania, victim assistance programs in all 67 counties received funding from the Crime Victims Fund, as administered by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency; and

WHEREAS, In 2000, Congress began capping annual spending from the Fund in order to ensure that a stable level of funding remains available for use to fund crime victim programs in future years; and

WHEREAS, Since 2004, the cap on the amount released has been lower than the amount of deposits into the Fund, thereby holding back more than 1.430 billion dollars collected for the Fund; and

WHEREAS, Despite these surpluses, in 2008 the cap on funds released was decreased by 35 million dollars, from 625 million dollars in 2007 to 590 million dollars in 2008, while the amount of deposits into the fund was 1.017 billion dollars in 2008; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, in addition to the 35 million dollar reduction in the cap, another 34.2 million dollars was taken from released funds to pay for management and administration costs of the federal Office of Justice Programs that administers the Fund; and

Sample Resolution

Resolution for County Commissioners

WHEREAS, Of the various programs paid for by the Crime Victims Fund, the State Victim Assistance Grants suffered the most drastic cuts, dropping from 395.9 million dollars in 2006 to 309 million dollars in 2008; and

WHEREAS, The amount of state victim assistance grants to Pennsylvania has dropped from 15,858,000 dollars in 2006 to 11,313,000 dollars in 2008, a reduction of 6,723,000 dollars, which are awarded to community-based crime victim services programs throughout the Commonwealth, as administered by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency; and

WHEREAS, Crime victim assistance programs throughout Pennsylvania are struggling to cope with these dramatic cuts and consequently, services to crime victims are in jeopardy, and are expecting a further cut of 18 percent effective July 2009; and

WHEREAS, The Crime Victims Fund's balance is currently 1.904 billion dollars, with another 710 million dollars estimated to be deposited in 2009; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the County Commission of _____ County, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, recommends to Congress that the annual cap on the VOCA Crime Victims Fund be increased to one billion dollars, and that the increase in released funds be allocated entirely to State Victim Assistance Grants; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Chief Clerk of County Commission of _____ County, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, transmit copies of this Resolution to the President pro tempore of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation, and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

Engaging Community Support

VICTIMS OF CRIME NEED YOUR HELP

February 24, 2009

[Recipient Name]

[Company Name]

[Street Address]

[City, State ZIP Code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

As a (domestic violence, rape crisis, MADD, comprehensive....) program providing services for victims of crime, we wish to draw your attention to the critical importance to victims, to the community, and to our justice system of the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund.

VOCA was enacted by Congress in 1984 as a vital, non-taxpayer funding source for states to provide money for services and compensation to help victims of crime and their families cope with the trauma and aftermath of all types of crimes.

VOCA funding consists of fines and penalties collected from federal offenders, not money collected from taxpayers. VOCA dollars are distributed by formula grant to every U.S. state and territory to support grants to local victim services programs for victim support, shelter, crisis intervention, counseling, court accompaniment, advocacy, and other services in the aftermath of crime. Across the nation, these offender penalties support a significant portion of victim assistance provided by local victim service programs, as does (agency).

In 2000, Congress placed a cap on the amount released from the VOCA Fund in order to ensure that a stable level of funding remains available for use to fund crime victim programs in future years. However, since 2004, the cap on the amount released has been lower than the amount of deposits into the Fund, thereby holding back more than \$1.430 billion collected for the Fund.

Despite the substantial surpluses in the VOCA Fund, the amount released has dwindled, then been cut dramatically. In 2008 the cap on funds released was decreased by \$35 million – from \$625 million in 2007 to \$590 million in 2008 – while the amount of deposits into the fund was \$1.017 billion dollars just in 2008.

As the VOCA Fund balance has grown, so has the demand for victim services. At present, the balance in the VOCA fund stands at nearly four times the amount released annually by Congress. In the meantime, victim services providers are struggling to make ends meet in the face of skyrocketing operating costs and a struggling economy.

This has reached a critical point in 2009. Based on proposed VOCA allocations for 2009, victim programs in Pennsylvania are now facing devastating budget cuts close to 20%. If immediate action isn't taken to release this critical funding, cuts will mean the elimination of core services and in some cases the closing of doors for victim service agencies.

We need your assistance in urging our leaders in Washington to release a significantly larger portion of these funds, if our services are to continue at the same level. We are not asking for taxpayer dollars. We are asking that the funds collected to support our programming be released to do just that.

(Continued on next page)

Engaging Community Support

VICTIMS OF CRIME NEED YOUR HELP

Crime victims will not go away just because the funding does. They will look to someone for services if victim service providers no longer have the resources to assist them. An impact of this nature would put a huge burden on the already financially strained criminal justice system and social service providers in our community.

As a vital stakeholder in our community (and/or criminal justice system), we need your support. We are in the process of sending a unified message (see attached) to our leaders in Washington about the vital importance of releasing more of these VOCA funds. Please join in this effort by sending a letter or passing a resolution to add your voice to our pleas.

For more information you may contact me at

Sincerely,

Increase Victim Assistance Allocation in the VOCA Fund

Sample Email Message

Subject: Increase Victim Assistance Allocation in the VOCA Fund

To: Member of Congress Email Address

Dear (Congressman, Congresswoman or Senator) Last Name:

As your constituent, I am writing to ask you to use the power and resources of Congress to increase funding for services to help victims in our communities cope with the aftermath of crime.

I am aware that the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund has a balance of close to \$2 billion. This Fund was created by Congress solely to assist crime victims and is sustained by criminal fines not taxpayer money. Therefore, I am asking you to support a one-time increase in the VOCA Fund cap to \$1 billion in the 2009 federal budget.

Even with this adjustment, the Fund still would have a balance of almost \$1 billion.

At a time when victims service providers are struggling in these tough economic times to respond to the many requests for assistance, I believe it's unfair to withhold non-taxpayer VOCA funding for services that offer safety and seek justice for innocent victims of crime.

The need is never more urgent; your support is never more necessary.

Thank you for your consideration.

Name

Address

Phone Number

Sample Phone Message

Hello, my name is (your name). As a constituent of (Member's Name), I am calling to urge the (Senator, Congresswoman or Congressman) to help the struggling victims service providers in my community. Please support a one-time increase in the VOCA Crime Victims Fund cap to \$1 billion in the 2009 federal budget. The need is urgent; the increase is critical. Thank you.

Sample Post Card for Crime Victims

VICTIMS OF CRIME NEED YOUR HELP

Increase Victim Assistance Allocation in the VOCA Fund

Another option for VOCA advocacy is a post card campaign by crime victims. Below is sample language for a post card.

Crime Victims Need Your Help

As a victim of crime, I am personally aware of the critical role local victim service providers play in helping individuals and families cope in the aftermath of a crime.

As your constituent, I am deeply concerned that Congress is sitting on close to \$2 billion in the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund, yet is strangely reluctant to release sufficient funding to support struggling victim service agencies during these difficult economic times.

After all, Congress created the VOCA Fund solely to assist crime victims, and the money – collected entirely from criminals, not taxpayers – is there to do just that.

I am asking you to support a one-time increase in the VOCA Fund cap to \$1 billion in the 2009 federal budget.

The need is urgent; the increase is critical.

Increase Victim Assistance Allocation in the VOCA Fund

Getting Your Message Out

Work With the Media

Build a Relationship with Your Local Media

We know that as one of Pennsylvania's victim service providers you are gravely concerned with the sharp funding cuts that have thwarted your program's capacity and ability to help victims cope with the aftermath of crime. However, getting others to also share this concern often requires the help of the media – one of the most effective conduits for your message.

The media can be a valuable partner in publicizing the gravity of the impact, putting pressure on federal, state and local elected officials to prioritize a funding increase, and encouraging community members to mobilize to secure stable resources for victim services.

The information below contains a few tips to help you build and sustain a positive working relationship with your local media so that you can call on them in good times (a human interest success story) and in bad (a homicide). Treat them as an ally and they are likely to respect you as a source and a resource for future stories.

Know Your Local Media

- Read the paper, watch the news, listen to the radio
- Pay attention to who's saying what, how they say it
- Learn names of reporters and their beats, obtain their contact information
- Clip and file newspaper articles
- Visit media and group Web sites to stay on top of the local market

Get Your Local Media to Know You

- Call/email to introduce yourself
- Comment on published stories
- Share your ideas
- Be available and always return calls
- Be conscious of deadlines
- Simplify your message, try to speak in sound bites
- Be scrupulous with your facts
- Be the first source reporters turn to on crime victim issues in your community
- Acknowledge when they do a good job, educate when they don't

Create a Media Response Team

Consider pulling together a team of community allies who are willing to reach out to or respond to the media on victim-related issues. Teams add credibility to your cause because they work with you, not for you. Members may include community business leaders, clergy, elected officials, prosecutors, health care practitioners, concerned citizens and academics. They can initiate or respond in a variety of ways – calling or emailing reporters, participating in media interviews, writing letters-to-the-editor or op-eds, hosting press events or standing with you at your media events.

Getting Your Message Out

Support Victims Working with the Media

In the painful aftermath of brutal or lethal acts of violence, survivors and family members of victims often find themselves both in the headlines and on the frontlines of the victim advocacy community – redirecting their pain and grief into efforts to raise public awareness, reform systems, and strengthen legal protections in an effort to spare others the horror of what they have had to endure.

Victim service providers can play a pivotal role in helping these survivors and family members determine when they're ready to use the extraordinary power of their own voices to become visible and vocal forces for social change.

The following tips can make the difference between a positive and a disastrous experience for victims when speaking to the media:

Tips for Advocates

Offer Assistance

- Make sure the victim has support system
- Serve as liaison with media
- Triage media requests
- Protect the victim from exploitation
- Work with the victim to establish ground rules for talking with the media

Help Prepare Victims for Interviews

- Anticipate key questions
- Anticipate negative questions
- Prepare a summary of key messages
- Prepare talking points
- Coach them to stay on message
- Practice, practice, practice

Inform Victims of their Rights and Choices

Let them know they have the right to:

- Say no to an interview
- Request a specific reporter
- Decline to answer certain questions or call back later with a response
- Request that offensive photographs/footage be omitted from broadcasts or publications
- Shape the interview – time, location, tone, scope of questions
- Ask the reporter to read back their quotes
- Shut down the interview at any time

Help Them Transition from Victim to Advocate

- Introduce them to victims' networks
- Connect them with speakers' bureaus
- Identify forums for their participation
- Assist them with memorial events
- Help them understand that change is slow, but well worth the investment