

### **Victim of Crime Act Fund**

Violence against women affects the lives of countless women and their families across the United States and does not discriminate based on socioeconomic, class, age and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Women of all ages, income levels and race-ethnicities are victims of violent acts including rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. And many more women are living their lives as survivors of violence. Today, it is estimated that one in six women are victims of attempted or completed rape and one in four are victims of domestic violence.

In 1984 as part of the Victims of Crime Act, Congress created the Victims of Crime Fund (VOCA). The VOCA fund provides money for victim assistance programs and victim compensation programs and is made up entirely of money collected from penalties, fees and fines that have been paid by federal criminals. The VOCA fund contains no taxpayer dollars. Money in the fund supports investigating and prosecuting child abuse, providing assistance to victims involved in federal criminal investigations, prosecutions and crimes, and, for grants to states to support victim services and victim compensation.

VOCA is an important sources of funding for state initiatives to address violence against women. Both the VOCA state victim assistance grant and the VOCA compensation grant are provided to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The VOCA state victim assistance grant support direct victim services including rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, counseling programs, support groups, advocacy, and case management services. The VOCA compensation grant provides financial reimbursement to victims of violent crimes for out-of-pocket medical expenses and mental health counseling.

Between 1984 and 2007, a total of \$9 billion dollars was deposited into the VOCA fund. However, because the fund is comprised of money collected from penalties, fees and fines, money in the fund fluctuates from year to year. In 2000, Congress took action to stabilize the amount in the fund. Congress limited (capped) the amount of money that could be removed each year from the fund ensuring money will be available for victims in the future. Today, the fund is estimated to have a balance of \$1.7 billion.

### **APPROPRIATIONS**

Victim assistance programs funded with VOCA grants are facing significant financial challenges as a result of lowering the VOCA cap and the process of disbursing VOCA funds. In fact, the continued lowering of the cap and the distribution of money is resulting in cuts to victim assistance programs across the country.

Since 2006, the VOCA cap has been lowered every year. It was capped at \$661 million and in 2007; the cap was reduced by \$36 million to \$625 million. In 2008, the cap was reduced by \$35 million to \$590 million. While the cap on the VOCA fund limits the amount of funding available for VOCA programs every year, the consistent lowering of the cap means less money is available over time. In addition, as money is increased for various VOCA programs less funding is available for grants to states for victims assistance. Both the continued lowering of the cap and the distribution of money is resulting in cuts to victim assistance programs throughout the country. Specifically, these cuts are forcing programs to reduce their services or close their doors. The cuts mean that less money is available to serve additional victims, expand services or cover rising administrative and operating costs. The bottom line is that women and girls who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking may not receive the assistance they need unless the VOCA cap is raised so that money for state assistance grants can increase.

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## **YWCA POSITION**

The YWCA supports public policies that protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and works to eradicate sexual assault and domestic violence, trafficking of women, and dating violence. The YWCA recognizes the need for anti-violence programs and policies to be culturally sensitive in both their approaches to combating violence against women and in responding to victims of violence. Specifically, we support the continuance and full funding for the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The YWCA also supports legislation that ensures employment stability and economic security for victims of violence against women.

## **FACTS**

- The VOCA fund is an important source of funding for addressing violence against women.
- The VOCA fund is a non-taxpayer source of funding. VOCA funds come from penalties, fines and fees that have been paid by federal criminals.
- The VOCA fund gives grants to states to support victim services such as rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, counseling programs, support groups, advocacy, and case management services. It also provides funds to states for victim compensation programs.
- Unless the cap on the VOCA fund is high enough, grants to states for victim assistance are reduced as funding for other VOCA programs increases.