

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Governor of Iowa
Iowa State Capitol
1007 E. Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

CC: *The Honorable Brenna Bird, Attorney General of Iowa*

July 28, 2023

RE: Requesting \$10 million in Justice System budget for crime victim services

Dear Governor Reynolds:

As victim service provider agencies who are members of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and on behalf of the crime victims we collectively serve, we write to request you include \$10 million in funding for victim services in your Justice System budget proposal this year and amend the budget line item to ensure state funds can support all victims of violent crime.

Our local agencies serve victims of violent crime including families impacted by homicide; survivors of domestic and sexual violence including stalking, rape, and child abuse; and survivors of human trafficking. Most of the 55,965 victims who sought support from Iowa victim service provider agencies last year were served by one of our agencies. ([Victim Assistance Annual Report](#)).

In addition to the crisis response provided by local agencies, Iowa's victim service delivery model prioritizes helping victims find stable housing to increase economic security, using mobile advocacy to better reach crime victims in rural areas, and improving access to services for sexual assault victims. It is nationally recognized for its success in expanding statewide access to comprehensive support services for crime victims. However, Iowa's inadequate state investment in victim services continues to undermine agency capacity to effectively support crime victims, jeopardizing their safety, and leaving many with limited options for support.

Fully supporting victims requires money and people. Crime victims need Iowa to do better. Insufficient state funding is driving a significant provider workforce shortage that threatens victim access to support while agencies are struggling to meet a growing demand for services, especially stabilizing support services like housing and help regaining economic stability. Federal grants enhance program capacity to support victims and remain the largest source of funding for services in Iowa and nationwide, but *state* funds provide essential, operational support for local agencies. We share your desire to support crime victims and ensure services remain available in every county, but we cannot effectively do that without people to do this challenging work.

Victim service providers tirelessly work alongside law enforcement, lawyers, judges, and an array of community service providers to support crime victims. They function as first responders in offering crisis support or accompanying victims in accessing medical care or assisting at crime scenes. They also support crime victims beyond the crisis. Agencies offer counseling and safety planning, they help victims replace identity documents, apply for victim compensation, understand their rights, navigate and accompany them in legal proceedings, complete job applications, avoid homelessness, find stable housing, and access food. Victim service providers connect crime victims to resources to help them regain financial independence, safety, and self-determination after experiencing violence inflicted on their minds and bodies, most often by someone they know or love.

Inadequate funding means fewer staff are available to provide support, fewer victims can receive support, and it limits the type of services agencies can provide. It also means staff do not have access to all the training and support they need, which risks higher burnout and turnover, and which certainly impacts the services staff are able to provide.

Crime victims rely on service providers to meet immediate needs, but post-crisis support services currently provided are essential to enhancing long-term stability and well-being. Importantly, economic support services like assistance finding housing and meeting basic needs, are the types of services most requested by victims- and the most staff intensive services to provide. Lack of funding inevitably limits agency capacity to provide 24/7 crisis response, reduces access to services in rural areas, and reduces agency capacity to provide the support services victims tell us they need. Provider shortages create ripple effects negatively impacting communities because victims lacking long-term stability continue to need and seek services.

Agencies do not have enough staff to effectively cover their enormous service areas and without additional funding they cannot offer the salaries, training, or benefits that would enable them to recruit or maintain the workforce needed to fully support crime victims. In 2015 Iowa's Crime Victim Assistance Division conducted a victim advocate [salary/benefit study](#) finding the salary of most victim service providers fell far short of a living wage and was so low many staff were eligible for the same public benefits they were helping survivors access. As a result, a starting salary of \$32,000 was recommended. Salaries have not changed much since then, but the cost of living has dramatically increased. The [2023 federal poverty level](#) for a family of four is \$30,000 or \$14.42 per hour without benefits or vacation.

Fully supporting crime victims must include funding and valuing the work of service providers who dedicate their lives to helping victims recover from violent crimes that have forever changed their lives. Almost [1 in 2 women](#) are impacted by intimate partner violence over a lifetime, including 26% of women who are raped -- yet victim-blaming persists in numerous ways that contribute to undervaluing these crime victims as well as the [workforce dedicated](#) to supporting them. Compare the average victim advocate salary to other service providers (as of June 2023): average [paralegal salary](#) is \$63K; average salary for [child welfare agency](#) staff is \$57K, average salary for a [patient navigator](#) is \$52K, average [child protective service investigator](#) is \$47K and all can access better support and benefits than victim service provider agencies can afford to offer.

It takes all of us to support crime victims. Victim service providers are stretched beyond capacity and cannot effectively meet the demand for victim support services without additional state funding. Regardless of the amount of funding from other sources, Iowa needs to do its part. As you draft your budget proposal, we urge you to allocate at least \$10 million in the Justice System budget for victim services. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Corona, PhD; Executive Director
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Nicole Stepleton Hardin; M. Ed; Deputy Director
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Lisa A Ambrose; CEO
Amani Community Services; Waterloo
Culturally specific victim support services for Black/African American communities

Gwen Bramlet-Hecker; Executive Director
Riverview Center; Dubuque
Sexual assault support services for 14 counties in NE Iowa

Ben Brustkern; Executive Director
Friends of the Family; Waterloo
Shelter/housing & human trafficking support services for 14 counties in NE Iowa

Melissa Cano Zelaya; Executive Director
L.U.N.A.; Des Moines
Culturally specific victim support services for Latino communities

Nicole Cisne Durbin; President and CEO
Family Resources; Davenport
Domestic/sexual violence, housing, human trafficking, homicide support services for 5 counties in SE Iowa

Michelle A. Cole; Executive Director
ACCESS Assault Care Center; Ames
Domestic violence, sexual assault, housing support services for 5 counties Central Iowa

Carson Eggland; Executive Director
Helping Services for Youth & Families; Decorah
Domestic violence support services for 7 counties in NE Iowa

Kristie Fortmann-Doser; Executive Director
Domestic Violence Intervention Program; Iowa City
Domestic violence & shelter/housing support services for 8 counties in SE Iowa

Pearl Hammes; Executive Director
Crisis Intervention Services; Oskaloosa
Sexual assault, Shelter, Homicide support services for 12 counties in South Central Iowa

Nelly Hill; Program Director, Domestic Violence Victim Services
Waypoint; Cedar Rapids
Domestic violence & homicide support services for 7 counties in NE Iowa

Mary J. Ingham; Executive Director
Crisis Intervention Service; Mason City
Domestic violence, sexual assault, & homicide support services for 23 counties in North Central/NE Iowa

Hibo Jama; Executive Director
Nisaa African Family Services; Des Moines
Culturally specific victim support services for African immigrant/refugee communities

Brenda McBride; Executive Director
Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center; Fort Dodge
Domestic violence, homicide, housing/shelter support services for 20 counties in North Central Iowa

Stephanie Pickinpaugh; Executive Director
SafePlace; Sioux City
Domestic violence support services for Plymouth & Woodbury counties; shelter services for 19 counties in NW Iowa

Lori A. Rinehart; Director, Domestic Violence Services
Children and Families of Iowa; Des Moines
Domestic violence & shelter support services for Polk & Warren counties

Adam Robinson; Executive Director
Rape Victim Advocacy Program (RVAP); Iowa City
Sexual assault support services for 8 counties in SE Iowa

Jessica Rohrs; Executive Director
Family Crisis Centers; Sioux Center
Statewide Victim Call Center ('hotline'); Domestic violence, human trafficking, homicide services in NW Iowa

Sapana Sharma; Assistant Director of Programs
Catholic Charities Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Program; Council Bluffs
Domestic violence & sexual assault support services for 9 counties; shelter services for 19 counties in SW Iowa

Abigail Sui; Executive Director
EMBARC; Des Moines
Culturally specific victim support services for immigrant/refugee communities

Johna Sullivan; Executive Director
Crisis Intervention & Advocacy Center; Adel
Domestic violence, sexual assault & homicide support services for 10 counties in SW Iowa

Lorraine Uehling; Executive Director
Family Crisis Center; Ottumwa
Domestic violence support services for 12 counties in South Central Iowa

Mira Yusef; MSW, MA; Executive Director
Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity; Des Moines
Culturally specific victim support services for API communities