

## Pending Funding Cut Threatens Crime Victim Support Services

*If Congress fails to act – which victims and what services does Iowa give up on?*

**A pending 37% funding cut in FY24 federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding threatens access to support services for Iowa crime victims. In most years, Iowa's VOCA victim assistance grant is over half of what Iowa spends to provide victim support services.** A cut like this to Iowa's largest source of funding for victim services means crime victims will lose access to essential support, especially in rural areas and communities disproportionately impacted by violence.

In FY23, Congress allocated \$1.9 billion for Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to states. The FY24 budget bills currently under consideration include only \$1.2 billion because the Crime Victim Fund (CVF) supporting the grants is so low, i.e., there is not enough money in the CVF to sustain VOCA funding at last year's level. This urgent request is not about increasing funding over last year – it is about maintaining current funding levels.

**Congress must find a way to sustain FY24 VOCA funding at last year's level of \$1.9 billion and to prevent a pending 37% cut (\$700 m), i.e., a loss of almost \$5 million in federal victim assistance grant funding to Iowa.** Legislation enacted in 2021 to sustain VOCA funding is working but it will take more time to sufficiently replenish the fund. Massive cuts and inconsistent funding do not benefit crime victims or service providers doing their best to provide support.

**How does this impact crime victims?** A 37% cut to Iowa's largest source of funding for victim services would decimate the capacity of victim service providers to effectively provide support. Crime victims would lose access to critical services, especially in rural areas and through small programs that support victims disproportionately impacted by violence. However, all service providers are currently struggling to meet increasing demand for services at the same time they have experienced multiple years of funding cuts – a 37% cut would be a breaking point. Less funding means fewer victims can receive support because fewer staff will be available to provide services, and it limits the type and amount of support services agencies can provide. Again, in most years, more than half of what Iowa spends on victim support services is funded through Iowa's VOCA victim assistance grant.

Nationwide VOCA victim assistance grants to states remain the most flexible and largest source of federal funds supporting state and local agencies providing direct support services to violent crime victims and in Iowa they are the only dedicated funds supporting homicide victims. In addition to funding homicide and domestic and sexual violence service providers, these funds support human trafficking victims; immigrant survivors; victim notification systems; victim specialists in county attorney, US Attorney, and law enforcement offices; Iowa Legal Aid; trauma centers; mental health services to children & adult victims; etc.

*To put this in perspective: In the FY23 federal budget, Iowa was awarded a \$13 million VOCA victim assistance grant – a 37% cut in FY24 would mean almost \$5 million fewer dollars for victim support services. Consider that a **\$5 million CUT** in funds would be greater than the total amount of federal funding Iowa receives from the Violence Against Women Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act in most years and equal to the amount of state funding Iowa invests in victim services.*

**Service providers cannot absorb this cut and victims will lose access to services. Without a solution the question for policymakers - which victims do we stop serving and what services do we stop providing?**

## VOCA BACKGROUND

### Federal Budget: Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Appropriations

- Federal FY22 VOCA: \$2.6 billion; Iowa victim assistance grant \$13.8 million\*
- Federal FY23 VOCA: \$1.9 billion; Iowa victim assistance grant \$13.1 million\*
- Federal FY24 VOCA pending: \$1.2 billion (\$700 m/37% cut from FY23)

**What are federal VOCA grants to states?** The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 created the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) to collect fines/penalties resulting from violations of federal law and use these funds -generated entirely with non-taxpayer revenues - to provide grants to states to support crime victims. Congress determines the amount of CVF money available for VOCA state formula grants and each year funds are approved in the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations (budget) bill and administered by the U.S. Department of Justice. Each state receives a VOCA *victim assistance* grant (formula based on population) and a VOCA *victim compensation* grant (formula based on collections to state victim compensation funds). In Iowa, federal VOCA grants are administered by the Victim Assistance section in the Attorney General's office. VOCA *victim assistance* grant funds are awarded to state and local programs providing victim support services (all types of crime); VOCA victim compensation grant funds are added to state victim compensation programs that reimburse victims for crime-related costs. Funding cuts mainly threaten VOCA *victim assistance* grants, i.e., victim compensation grants use a different formula and are not directly impacted by federal cuts to VOCA.

**Why is this happening?** From FY10 through FY14 the CVF collected an average of \$2 billion each year but dispersed only an average of \$700 million per year. At the request of states and service providers who were struggling to meet an increasing demand for services, Congress significantly raised the allocation cap (the amount released) in FY16 and for the next few years. This allowed Iowa to dramatically expand victim access to comprehensive support services. However, these investments could not be sustained because deposits into the CVF dipped to historic lows due to a change in federal prosecution strategies, including a decrease in criminal prosecutions and an increase in use of deferred settlements and non-prosecution agreements. Although deferred settlements and non-prosecution agreements often require payment of large monetary penalties, since these were not counted as criminal prosecutions, they were not deposited into the CVF and were instead deposited into the general treasury.

Congress approved legislation known as "The VOCA Fix" with broad bi-partisan support, including unanimous support from Iowa's Congressional delegation. It was signed into law July 22, 2021. The law made a structural change to the VOCA statute directing fees and fines from violations of federal law resolved with deferred settlements and non-prosecution agreements be deposited into the CVF, i.e., in addition to fines/fees from criminal prosecutions. This critical change enables more funds to be available for crime victims, means the fund can replenish more quickly, and improves long-term stability of the CVF.

**The VOCA Fix law is working but it will take more time to sufficiently replenish.** Over \$1 billion has been deposited since the law was signed. In fact, without the passage of this law, the CVF would not have been able to sustain the FY23 release of VOCA grant funding to states. However, it will take more time for the CVF to sufficiently replenish. The law enables more funds to be available to crime victims and will help maintain a consistent source of funds in the future. The FY24 House and Senate budget bills could only allocate \$1.2 billion from the CVF because the fund is still too low- which would be a 37% cut from the \$1.9 billion allocated in FY23. We need Congress to find a way to prevent this catastrophic 37% cut.

*\*States do not receive VOCA grant awards in time to spend in the current Federal FY so Iowa grant funds are allocated in the following State FY, e.g., Iowa's FFY22 award is allocated in SFY23, etc.*