

Statement in Response: Iowa AG's Request for Additional Funds for Iowa Victim Service Programs

The Iowa Attorney General's Office asked for a \$4.6 million boost for Victim Assistance Grants in its fiscal year 2025 state budget request dedicated to bolstering the state's crime victim service provider agencies.

We appreciate Attorney General Bird's efforts for actively seeking additional state funds, which are crucial for Iowa crime victims, particularly in light of the imminent threat of a 41% reduction in Iowa's largest source of federal funding for victim support services –generated entirely with non-taxpayer revenues – through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

This potential cut in federal funding could lead to a substantial \$5 million loss to agencies providing support services to survivors, families, and communities across the state – decimating the capacity of victim service provider agencies to maintain statewide access to comprehensive support services. It will leave many violent crime victims with no place to go, especially in rural areas and via small programs serving communities disproportionately impacted by violence.

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) support 26 local victim service provider agencies receiving federal, state, local, and private funding to provide comprehensive support services to violent crime victims, including families impacted by homicide; and victims of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, rape, child abuse, and human trafficking. Most of the 55,965 victims who sought support from Iowa victim service provider agencies last year were served by one of these programs.

These victim service providers are vital in helping crime victims recover and become contributing members of their families and communities. With the persistent prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the concentration of violent crime victimization among individuals who have previously experienced any violent crime, more significant and consistent investment in victim support services could have a substantial impact on reducing crime and preventing violence.

Victim service providers work tirelessly alongside various stakeholders to assist crime victims, from crisis response to long-term support. Their roles include counseling, safety planning, helping with paperwork, guiding through legal proceedings, job applications, preventing homelessness, finding stable housing, and connecting victims with financial independence and recovery resources.

For years, insufficient state and federal funding has jeopardized victim access to support. The failure to prioritize state investment in victim services exacerbates the impact of the looming 41% cut in federal VOCA funds. Help for crime victims involves a combination of federal, state, local, and private funds. Iowa's reliance on federal VOCA funding – with a minimal state investment of \$5 million – strains service providers.

Despite federal grants enhancing program capacity, consistent state investment is crucial for operational support and statewide accessibility of services. A lack of funds translates to fewer available staff, limited support for victims, constraints on victim access to 24/7 crisis response, support in rural areas, and limitations on the services victims need.

We appreciate the efforts of Attorney General Bird in requesting additional state funding and asking federal policymakers to help avert this looming crisis, as well as the responsiveness of Iowa's U.S. Congressional delegation in meeting with Iowa service providers and committing to work toward solutions that truly support Iowa crime victims. However, crime victims and the people who support them desperately need policymakers to prioritize their promises and come through with additional state and federal funding.

Violence is preventable, and failing to address it is a public policy choice. Victims are counting on our state lawmakers to do the right thing and invest at least an additional \$4.6 million in victim services this legislative session.