FEDERAL FUNDING TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is pervasive and life-threatening and impacts millions of victims each year. Federal policies have helped to significantly reduce domestic violence-related crimes and increase safety for victims. We urge Congress to build upon these successes and affirm our collective commitment to ending domestic violence by providing federal investments in these vital federal programs that will improve and save victims’ lives, hold perpetrators accountable, and transform responses to domestic violence.

☒ Support a FY 18 budget that invests in non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs and replaces scheduled sequestration cuts through a balanced package: With the threat of sequestration looming over the FY18 budget, we urge Congress to eliminate the constraints on discretionary spending caps that were lowered to austerity levels since sequestration went into effect in FY13. We further urge Congress to oppose funding cuts to non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs and pass a budget that invests in social safety nets for the most vulnerable.

☒ Fund targeted investments for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act ($175 million) and related key programs at HHS: The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) funds emergency shelters, crisis lines, counseling, victim assistance, and other vital services for over 1.3 million domestic violence victims and their children each year. FVPSA funding has remained relatively stagnant, resulting in inadequate services available for victims in need. As the only dedicated federal funding source for domestic violence services, FVPSA must be funded at its full authorization amount of $175 million to begin meeting the desperate need. Additionally, we ask Congress to provide continued investments in related programs at HHS, including the DELTA Prevention program.

☒ Release needed funds from the Victims of Crime Act Fund (VOCA): VOCA is a fund for victim services created out of fines and penalties paid by federal criminals, rather than taxpayer dollars. Over 4,000 agencies rely on VOCA to provide services to nearly 4 million crime victims annually. We urge Congress to release $4 billion (or at least the equivalent of the 3-year average) from the VOCA fund (with no transfers to other programs or agencies) to address the gap in available services. We urge Congress to reject proposals to permanently rescind funds from the VOCA reserve. Additionally, we urge Congress to establish a VOCA tribal funding stream to meet the desperate needs of victims on tribal lands.

☒ Fund targeted investments in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA): VAWA programs are at the heart of our nation’s response to domestic violence. Each of these programs is critical to ensuring that victims are safe, that offenders are held accountable, and that our communities are more secure. Key programs within VAWA include the following:
  - The Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors (STOP) state formula grant program supports coordinated community responses to domestic and sexual violence, as well as specialized services.
  - The Civil Legal Assistance for Victims program (LAV) addresses the civil legal needs of victims. It provides practical solutions and long-term stability for victims and their children, and helps to lower incidents of domestic violence.
  - The Services for Rural Victims grant program enables communities to develop services to meet the unique needs of victims in rural areas.
  - The Transitional Housing grant program provides an essential continuum between emergency shelter and permanent safe housing for survivors fleeing violence.
  - The Improving Criminal Justice Response program increases offender accountability and reduces homicide.
  - The Sexual Assault Services Program state formula grant program funds rape crisis centers and services.

These, and all of VAWA’s programs, must be funded at their full authorization levels to address the continued epidemic of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.
INVESTMENTS IN NON-DEFENSE DISCRETIONARY PROGRAMS

Victims of domestic and sexual violence often rely on an array of social safety nets to rebuild their lives after fleeing abuse or experiencing trauma. Victim advocates are incredibly concerned with threatened cuts to the overall non-defense discretionary (NDD) budget and to specific programs that help survivors. We urge Congress to continue to provide strong investments in housing, legal services, human services, economic supports and other safety net programs to ensure that survivors can find safety and long-term stability for themselves and their children.

OVERVIEW OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES – DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS

Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) – $175 million funding request

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) program supports life-saving services, including emergency shelters, crisis hotlines, counseling, and services for underserved communities throughout the United States and territories. A formula grant administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, FVPSA is the only federal funding source dedicated to domestic violence shelters and programs.

FVPSA is the cornerstone of our nation’s efforts to address domestic violence. There are approximately 2,000 community-based domestic violence programs for victims and their children (approximately 1,500 of which are FVPSA-funded through state formula grants). Many programs across the country use their FVPSA funding to keep the lights on and their doors open. The importance of this funding cannot be overstated: victims in every community must have a place where they can flee when they are escaping life-threatening violence.

A multi-state study, funded by the National Institute of Justice, shows conclusively that the nation’s domestic violence shelters address both the urgent safety needs and long-term security needs of victims and are helping victims protect themselves and their children.

Despite FVPSA’s great promise, community-based domestic violence programs report that at current funding levels they cannot meet the overwhelming need for services. The increased attention on domestic violence through high-profile abusers, increased training for law enforcement, prosecutors and court officials, investments in homicide reduction programs, and efforts to increase screening and referrals by healthcare and social service professionals, have led to a corresponding increase in demand for emergency shelter, hotlines, and supportive services. In 2014, domestic violence programs funded by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) provided shelter and nonresidential services to approximately 1.3 million victims. However, due to lack of capacity, an additional 196,467 requests for shelter went unmet. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) Domestic Violence Counts Census found that in just one day during 2016, while more than 72,959 victims of domestic violence received services, 11,991 requests for services went unmet, largely due to lack of funding. Of those unmet requests, 66% were for safe housing.

For those individuals who are not able to find safety, the consequences can be extremely dire, including continued exposure to life-threatening violence or homelessness. It is unacceptable that victims cannot find safety for themselves and their children due to a lack of adequate investment in these services. We urge you to request $175 million for FVPSA funding to help meet the immediate needs of victims in danger and to continue our nation’s work to prevent and end domestic violence. Additionally, FVPSA is due to be reauthorized, and we urge you to support swift reauthorization of this vital and life-saving foundation of our nation’s response to domestic violence.
DELTA (CDC) – $6 million funding request
The Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) program at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is the only dedicated federal funding source for the primary prevention of domestic violence. In approximately 50 communities across the nation, the DELTA program works to identify effective strategies for preventing first-time perpetration and first-time victimization of domestic violence. Through the use of evidence-supported initiatives, including social change and public health strategies, DELTA states have piloted and evaluated a range of programs, designed to promote safety and respect across communities. The growing evidence base shows that such strategies have the potential to reduce multiple forms of violence. Over the history of the program, only 16 states have been able to participate as DELTA projects. Preliminary evaluation results show a growing body of evidence that supports this work, indicating that domestic violence and dating violence rates can be decreased over time with the implementation of DELTA programming. The work being done with multi-level strategies (individual, relationship, community and societal strategies) focuses on changing social norms and promoting behaviors that support healthy relationships. An increase in funding will enable the DELTA program to expand to additional states and communities, and will also provide the opportunities for communities to leverage additional funding. DELTA should minimally be funded at its $6 million authorization level.

Related programs at the Department of Health and Human Services (see chart)
FVPSA and related programs work together to develop effective responses to domestic and sexual violence. Key programs within the LHHS bill include the National Domestic Violence Hotline, funded through the Administration for Children Youth and Families; the Rape Prevention and Education Program; and the Preventive Health and Health Services Block grant, funded through the Centers for Disease Control. We urge Congress to fund each of these programs at their full authorization level.

**Overview of Commerce, Justice, Science – Department of Justice Programs**

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) – $4 billion release request
VOCA uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund for programs that directly serve victims of crime, including state formula victim assistance grants. These funds, which come from fines paid by federal criminals, support services to 4 million victims of all types of crimes annually, through 4,400 direct service agencies such as domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and child abuse treatment programs.

Recent increases in the release of VOCA funds (at least 3-year average of deposits to the Fund) are having a significant impact on victim services. The steady VOCA funding has allowed communities to assess gaps in services and plan spending to make the biggest impact. The field is hopeful that continued release of VOCA funds, at this level, will allow them to fill the long-standing and unacceptable gaps in services. The balance in the Crime Victims Fund is more than enough to maintain increased VOCA funding releases without jeopardizing the Fund’s future sustainability, as long as funds are not inappropriately transferred to other non-VOCA programs.

**Annual release:** Congress should set the annual VOCA funding release level at no less than the average amount deposited into the Fund over the three previous fiscal years, which is approximately $4 billion for FY18.

**Harmful transfers and permanent rescissions:** The FY16 and FY17 Appropriations bills transferred VOCA funds to pay for VAWA programs, and the President’s FY18 budget proposal would continue this harmful practice and transfer additional funds to other Department of Justice programs. The Senate FY18 CJS Appropriations bill also continues this practice. The practice of transferring funds is a dangerous precedent, which has effectively resulted in the Fund paying for other Department of Justice programs. If Congress and the Administration rely on the Fund for other programs, less will be available for VOCA victim assistance programs. These practices could deplete VOCA’s reserve, which would have dire consequences for all crime victims. Additional detail in the President’s FY18 budget reveals the Administration’s plan to continue this practice well into the future, which is of grave concern.
Additionally, the Administration’s proposal recommends permanently rescinding $1.3 billion dollars from the Crime Victims Fund. Permanently removing money retained in the Fund and transferring funds to non-VOCA programs poses a serious threat to the Fund’s long-term viability. Congress should discontinue VOCA funding transfers and reject the proposal to permanently rescind over $1 billion from the reserve.

**Tribal funding stream:** Individuals on tribal lands experience disproportionately high rates of domestic and sexual violence and desperately need funding for victim services. Tribes have no access to federal VOCA funds. Congress should establish a federal funding stream from VOCA for Tribes.

**Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and related programs (CJS Funding)**

VAWA programs are at the heart of our nation’s response to domestic violence. Each of these programs is critical to ensuring that victims are safe, that offenders are held accountable, and that our communities are more secure. Ongoing, annual investment in VAWA has resulted in incredible progress. However, if funding does not increase or is cut, this progress will be eroded – victims will not have the resources and system-wide response they need to escape abuse. Advocates are concerned with news that the President’s FY18 proposal includes projections of deep cuts to VAWA over the next 10 years. Though officials explained the cuts by saying that the Administration was continuing to search for “flexible funding” for VAWA (e.g., the VOCA fund transfer), the apparent significant decrease in investment is alarming. Congress must continue to protect investment in VAWA.

**Specific Program Requests for FY18**

**VAWA STOP Program – $222 million funding request**

VAWA’s Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors (STOP) Grant Program, one of the most far-reaching VAWA programs, is at the core of effective coordinated community responses to domestic violence and sexual assault. These collaborative responses help hundreds of thousands of victims find safety and receive services, while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. As a foundational VAWA program, STOP funds are awarded to every state and territory through a formula-based system. States use STOP funding to train law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts to improve the system-wide response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Many states establish special units in law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices to address domestic and sexual violence. Victims benefit from services, including advocacy, crisis intervention, local hotline call advocacy, counseling and support, and victim/witness notification. Additionally, STOP-funded programs help survivors obtain orders of protection and promote the prosecution of domestic and sexual violence cases. A 2014 report to Congress showed that the STOP grant program helped 431,244 victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking that year; funded more than 2,200 staff; and provided professional training for more than 200,000 criminal justice system professionals. Increased investment in STOP will allow communities to expand life-saving homicide reduction efforts, continue to improve law enforcement and prosecution responses, and serve additional victims. Congress should appropriate $222 million to support these essential, comprehensive responses.

**Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) – $57 million funding request**

Research indicates that the practical nature of legal services gives victims long-term alternatives to their abusive relationships. Legal services are also vital to support survivors of sexual assault in civil matters. However, the retainers or hourly fees for private legal representation are beyond the means of most victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The LAV program is the only federally-funded program designed to meet the specific legal needs of victims. Targeted increases to the LAV program are a sound investment in long-term solutions to violence. Congress should appropriate $57 million for this program to support legal help for victims.
Rural Grant program – $50 million funding request
Victims in rural areas face unique barriers, including lack of access to child care, legal services, and public transportation; under-resourced law enforcement; and a lack of services. Funding for the Rural Grant program, which supports services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault living in rural and isolated areas, has either been cut or remained stagnant for the last several years despite the enormous need and despite a number of states becoming newly eligible for the program in VAWA 2013. Congress should appropriate $50 million for this program.

Transitional Housing program – $35 million funding request
This vital VAWA program helps communities in every state give victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking a safe place to begin to rebuild their shattered lives. On just one day in 2016, 15,283 adults and children were housed in domestic violence transitional housing programs. On the same day, however, 2,768 requests for transitional housing were denied due to a lack of capacity. The extreme nationwide dearth of affordable housing forces many victims of domestic violence to return to their abusers while others are forced into homelessness. Increased investment in the Transitional Housing program will allow more communities to ensure that victims do not have to make these unfathomable choices. Congress should appropriate $35 million for this program.

Improving Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking (ICJR)\(^1\) – $73 million funding request
The ICJR program encourages state, local, and tribal governments and courts to treat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking as serious violations of criminal law, requiring the coordinated involvement of the entire criminal justice system. The program supports homicide reduction initiatives designed to address the urgent problem of abuse victims being murdered, especially those in escalating domestic violence situations. Additionally, VAWA 2013 increased ICJR’s focus on improving the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault. Increased investment in ICJR at $73 million will allow communities to continue this life-saving work.

Sexual Assault Services Program – $40 million funding request
The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) was authorized in VAWA 2005 as the first federal funding stream dedicated to the provision of direct services to victims of sexual violence. The Office on Violence Against Women’s most recent report to Congress found that 40,000 survivors annually received services through SASP; 200 advocates and counselors were funded at local programs; and 60,000 hotline calls were answered. Across the country, SASP funds support the services adult and child victims need most, including counseling, accompaniment through medical and legal processes, and support for underserved populations. The nation’s 1,315 sexual assault programs often lack the resources to meet victims’ most basic needs. According to a 2016 survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV), more than half of these programs have a waiting list for counseling services and more than one-third have a waiting list for support groups. Congress should appropriate $40 million for SASP to support local rape crisis centers.

Remaining VAWA and related programs – full funding (see chart)
All VAWA and related programs work together to provide a comprehensive response to victims of violence. These include life-saving services to underserved victims, including victims with disabilities and elderly victims; programs aimed at children, youth, and college students; projects addressing courts and visitation; response to the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence on tribal lands; and prevention programs and public health responses to violence and abuse. These programs must receive sustained and increased funding to ensure that our communities can build on our years of progress and meet the needs of all victims.

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\(^{1}\) Improving Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Grant Program (ICJR) was formerly named the Grants to Encourage Arrest Program (GTEAP).