



PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER
of Children's Advocacy Centers
and Multidisciplinary Teams

PA Chapter of Children's Advocacy Centers
P.O. Box 3323
Erie, PA 16508

December 4, 2020

Dear Senator or Representative,

As we close out this year of global pandemic, non-profit and human service agencies that rely on charitable giving and grant funding prepare to face significant budget shortages. As economic uncertainty continues, Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) face the added challenge of effectively responding to child abuse when mandated reporters such as teachers are not seeing students in school environments. With more children at home and accessible to perpetrators—52% of whom are family members of victims—the resources provided by CACs are needed more than ever.

CACs coordinate multidisciplinary teams of experts—including law enforcement, medical, victim advocacy, mental health, and child welfare—who provide the investigative response to child abuse as well as follow-up services to victims and families. CACs are committed to holding offenders accountable and to helping children heal from the trauma of abuse. In 2019, our 40+ CACs across Pennsylvania served a total of 16,722 children by providing 12,597 forensic interviews, 6,195 medical exams by qualified pediatric nurses, and direct counseling or referrals to counseling services for 8,262 children.

Unfortunately, without immediate Congressional action, CACs may not be able to continue providing services at those levels. Along with other programs for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, drunk driving, homicide, and other crimes, CACs rely heavily on grants established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA). In Fiscal Year 2020, the VOCA disbursement decreased by an alarming 25% and we have been told to expect additional, potentially catastrophic cuts in 2021.

VOCA grants are the primary funding source for victim services in all 50 states and six U.S. territories. Funding is derived from penalties paid by offenders convicted of federal crimes, and not from taxpayers. Unfortunately, deposits into the fund have steadily declined as the Department of Justice increasingly relies on non-prosecution and deferred-prosecution agreements, rather than pursuing criminal prosecutions. In these cases, penalty payments that would otherwise fund VOCA grant recipients such as our CACs are being deposited instead into the General Treasury. If this trend continues—and unless specific changes are enacted—the VOCA fund balance is projected to reach a ten-year low by the end of 2021.

To avoid a catastrophic funding crisis, we need you to make sure that the omnibus spending bill expected to come before Congress any day now will include VOCA "fix" legislation. The primary aims of a VOCA "fix" should be to 1) *redirect monetary penalties from deferred and non-prosecution agreements to the VOCA fund*, and 2) *increase the federal government's contribution to state victim compensation funds*.

In a year when non-profits have had to cancel many in-person fundraising events and state budgets are being squeezed by the extraordinary demands of the pandemic, our CACs cannot sustain federal funding cuts. On behalf of Children's Advocacy Centers, we call on you and other elected officials to support a permanent VOCA "fix" that will ensure a sustainable source of funding for the critical work of responding to child abuse.

Sincerely,

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