

## Written Testimony

### **FY24 Funding: VAWA, VOCA Programs & Crime Victims Fund**

Prepared for presentation to the  
U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

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Chairman Hal Rogers, Ranking Member Matt Cartwright, and distinguished members of the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee, the **Daughters of Penelope (DOP)**, an international service organization for women of Greek heritage and Philhellenes, which is dedicated, in part, to supporting survivors and their families of domestic violence, is requesting meaningful support for **Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) (Office of Justice Programs - OVC)** and **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) (Office of Violence Against Women - OVW)** programs at the **Department of Justice**.

We sincerely thank Congress for taking important measures recently to strengthen federal programs that address domestic violence and that provide the lifesaving services needed for survivors and their families. These measures included the passage of the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021, which is beginning to help stabilize the Crime Victims Fund, and the passage of a strong bipartisan-backed VAWA reauthorization through 2027. Now, these programs must be properly funded. To continue funding the essential and lifesaving services to crime victims, Congress must provide a Crime Victims Fund cap for FY 2024 that is set at \$2 billion; and as the President's FY 2024 budget rightfully proposes, without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute. We also support—at a minimum—the President's proposed investment request of \$1.02 billion for VAWA programs but recommend \$1.14 billion to truly meet survivors' needs.

#### **VOCA Programs & Crime Victims Fund**

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) created the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), which serves as a mechanism to fund compensation and services for the nation's victims of federal crime. The Fund is comprised of money from criminals, and by law, the Fund is dedicated solely to victim services. For example, the Fund is used to help pay for state victim compensation and assistance programs and grants to victim service providers. A considerable amount supports victims' out-of-pocket expenses such as medical and counseling fees, lost wages, and funeral and burial costs. In FY2019, 6.5 million victims of violent crime, including domestic violence, received services through Victim Assistance programs, according to the Department of Justice.<sup>1</sup> The Fund

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/doj/page/file/1249306/download>, Page 17.

provides formula grants to over 11,000 local victim assistance programs.<sup>2</sup> These agencies provided services to more than six million victims of crime, including victims of murder, assault and sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, stalking and elder abuse, and others.

The Crime Victims Fund is financed by fines, forfeitures, or other penalties paid by federal crime offenders. *Therefore, the Crime Victims Fund is not funded by taxpayer dollars.* However, it is unfortunate that in the past Congress carved out funds from the CVF to use as offsets for other government programs. Because CVF is comprised of non-taxpayer dollars, it should not be considered available for use for non-VOCA programs in the federal budget. Therefore, we recommend to the Subcommittee that the Fund be used only for programs authorized under the VOCA statute. We applaud the President's budget for rightfully eliminating transfers. We request their elimination as they harm the Fund's long-term viability and ability to commit to victims.

Finally, we recommend setting the Crime Victims' Fund cap to at least \$2 billion, which is \$800 million more than the President's recommendation, to address the urgent needs of victims of crime. Thanks to the VOCA Fix, deposits to the Fund are beginning to increase after years of shortfalls that led to severe cuts to services funding. Further, Congress established an appropriation cap on funds available for distribution intended to maintain the CVF as a stable source of support for future victim services. At the recommended cap level, Congress will not only ensure the continuation of enhanced services to victims to meet their needs, but it also does not contribute or add to the national debt or deficit because these are non-taxpayer funds.

## **VAWA Programs**

Domestic violence is a pervasive, life-threatening crime affecting millions of individuals across our nation regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, race or religion. The statistics are alarming. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)<sup>3</sup>:

- More than 1 in 4 women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Approximately 8 million women are raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked by a current or former intimate partner each year.
- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 38 men have experienced rape in her or his lifetime.
- Nationwide, an average of 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2015 Data Brief:

- In the United States, intimate partner contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking was experienced by 36.4% (or 43.6 million) of U.S. women during their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>
- Almost 1 in 2 women and more than 2 in 5 men reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>

Also, of concern, are the following stats:

- On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/ind/page/file/1489521/download>, Page 144.

<sup>3</sup> NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, accessed <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DVSA-Fact-Sheet-Updated-71222.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey | 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence, P.5, accessed [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/NISVSRreportonIPV\\_2022.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs/NISVSRreportonIPV_2022.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs\\_report2010-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf)

- Approximately 26% of children under the age of 18 are exposed to domestic violence in their lifetime.<sup>7</sup>

Our nation’s response to intimate partner and domestic violence is driven by VAWA programs. Each of these programs is critical to ensuring that victims are safe, that offenders are held accountable, and that our communities are more secure. Thanks to VAWA, steady progress has been made, however, there are many victims who still suffer in silence. A 2022 24-hour survey of 1,642 domestic violence programs across the U.S. found that a staggering 79,335 victims were served in one day. However, 12,692 requests for services (such as emergency shelter, transportation, or legal representation) went unmet because programs lacked the resources to provide them.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 53 percent of the unmet services were for Housing and Emergency Shelter. The unconscionable gap between need and resources is clear.

### **Daughters of Penelope’s Work to Support Domestic Violence Shelters**

Why are VAWA and VOCA programs important to the Daughters of Penelope? In addition to our chapters supporting domestic violence shelters in their respective local communities, the Daughters of Penelope is a national sponsor and stakeholder of two domestic violence shelters—**Penelope House in Mobile, Alabama, and Penelope’s Place in Brockton, Massachusetts.** In the past, the Daughters of Penelope has supported WIN Hellas, which is an NGO based in Athens, Greece, that is active in the prevention of violence against women.

Penelope House was the first shelter established in Alabama when it opened in 1979. Since then, Penelope House is recognized as a model shelter for others to emulate. VAWA and VOCA grant funding has been critical in helping Penelope House to meet its mission of providing safety, protection, and support to victims of domestic violence and their children through shelter, advocacy, and individual and community education. Penelope House has been awarded VAWA and VOCA grants from the following programs: Shelter Services, Court Advocate Program, and Transitional Living Program. Portions of these grants help to fund the case managers, case and court advocates, and children’s counselors and program coordinators, among other employees who help to provide life-saving support to domestic violence victims and their children.

### **Statistics | Effectiveness and Importance of VAWA and VOCA Grant Funding**

- Historically, VOCA/VAWA grants have funded more than 37% of Penelope House’s budget.

Penelope House’s Court Advocacy Program is funded by VOCA and VAWA. Its 2022 stats for clients served were:

- Adult Clients: 7,845
- Children: 6,565
- Court Appointments with Clients: 6,710
- Clients Assisted to obtain protection from abuse or no contact orders: 1,206

VOCA supports the salaries and benefits for **seven Court/Victim Advocates** who provide services to victims of domestic violence throughout Mobile, Washington, Clarke, and Choctaw Counties of Alabama as they navigate within the court system. (VOCA has become increasingly important to Penelope House because its services were expanded to include more counties.)

VAWA supports a **full-time Court Advocate Administrative Assistant** and a portion of the salary for a Court/Victim Advocate for the Court Advocacy Program. The Court Advocate

<sup>7</sup> NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, accessed <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DVSA-Fact-Sheet-Updated-71222.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report, accessed <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/16th-Annual-Domestic-Violence-Counts-National-Summary-FINAL.pdf>

Administrative Assistant provides administrative support to Court/Victim Advocates and assistance to the Court Advocacy Supervisor. The assistant also collects and compiles program data needed for the evaluation of the Court Advocacy Program. The Court Advocate Administrative Assistant is dually trained to serve as a Court/Victim Advocate, when necessary, in case of illness or any other absence of court advocates. Thus, a survivor will not have to be alone as he/she attempts to navigate within the court system.

Penelope House's Emergency Shelter Program is funded by VOCA. It's 2022 service stats, all of which increased, were:

- Adults sheltered: 258
- Children sheltered: 340
- Total Client Service Hours: 8,622
- Total Nights of shelter provided: 6,055
- Crisis calls: 1,746
- Meals Served: 18,360

Penelope's Place, a five-bedroom shelter, is the only emergency domestic violence shelter in Brockton and one of only 26 in Massachusetts. It is often the first stop for the region's most vulnerable families and the last chance for trauma survivors who have nowhere else to turn.

- In Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022), it housed 63 survivors of domestic violence, including children, who were fleeing imminent danger.
- Since FY 18, the shelter has seen a 31% increase in the number of survivors served.
- In FY 22, half of the survivors were adults while the other half of the survivors served were children of whom 10% were infants (under one year of age) and 33% were children under the age of 10.

VOCA and VAWA funding is equally vital to Penelope's Place. VOCA funding supports a rape crisis center and domestic violence support programs including "SAFEPLAN" court advocacy that aids residents with restraining and harassment orders. According to Penelope Place's president and CEO, "In fact, 75% of people who call a statewide shelter for DV shelter are turned away every day. That's why VAWA and VOCA funding is so important—the more supports/resources we can provide survivors, the safer they are, and the more people we can serve as we are able to help them move into affordable housing more quickly."

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Daughters of Penelope is requesting support for **Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)** and **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** programs, which are vital to DOP programs that serve its mission. Specifically, we request a **Crime Victims Fund** cap for FY 2024 set to at least \$2 billion and without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute, as rightfully proposed by the President's FY 24 budget. The CVF is not funded by taxpayer dollars. Therefore, the cap can be sustained or raised without adding to the national debt or deficit. We also support—at a minimum—the President's proposed investment request of \$1.02 billion for VAWA programs but recommend \$1.14 billion to truly meet survivors' needs. As the missions of domestic violence centers nationwide, such as Penelope House and Penelope's Place, expand into jurisdictions due to the unfortunate increased need to provide services, the viability of VOCA and VAWA grants have become ever more important to meet the survivors' needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our written testimony to the Subcommittee.