

Written Testimony

FY23 Funding: VAWA, VOCA Programs & Crime Victims Fund

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

Submitted By:

Kathy Bizoukas

National President

Daughters of Penelope

1909 Q Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20009

www.daughtersofpenelope.org • (202) 234-9741 • dophq@ahepa.org

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Chair Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member Jerry Moran, 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 victims 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 thank Congress for passing the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021, which will stabilize the Crime Victims Fund. To continue funding the essential and lifesaving services to crime victims, Congress must provide a Crime Victims Fund cap for FY2023 that is set at \$2.65 billion; and as the President's FY2023 budget rightfully proposes, without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute. Moreover, we also are grateful to Congress for passing a strong bipartisan-backed reauthorization of VAWA through 2027. Now, it must be properly funded. Therefore, we support—at a minimum—the President's strong proposed investment FY23 request of \$1 billion for VAWA programs.

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.¹ The Fund provides formula grants to over 11,000 local victim assistance programs.² These agencies

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

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

provided services to nearly millions of 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 Congress often carves 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. Moreover, as the former Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus would advocate, "not only does raiding the Crime Victims Fund violate the intent of the law, but it violates the [VOCA] statute itself..." Therefore, we recommend to the Subcommittee that the Fund be used only for programs authorized under the VOCA statute. However, recent appropriations bills passed by Congress, and previous administrations' budget requests, have carved out funds from the Crime Victims Fund for non-VOCA authorized programs. As example, in FY2022, Congress transferred \$575 million from the CVF to VAWA programs, the highest level. We applaud the President's budget for rightfully eliminating transfer, and we request the elimination of transfers that harm the Fund's long-term viability and ability to commit fully to crime victims.

Finally, we recommend setting the Crime Victims' Fund cap to at least \$2.65 billion. 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 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)³:

- More than 1 in 3 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 71 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.⁴
- One in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.⁵

Also, of concern, are the following stats:

³ NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, accessed https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Library_General_DV_SA_Factsheet.pdf

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

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

- 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.⁶
- Nationwide, an average of 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day.⁷
- Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence annually.⁸

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 there are many victims who still suffer in silence. A 2021 24-hour survey of domestic violence programs across the U.S. found that although 20,701 Hotline calls were received (averaging more than 14 calls every minute). However, 9,444 requests for services (such as emergency shelter, transportation, or legal representation) went unmet because programs lacked the resources to provide them.⁹ Sixty-four percent of the unmet services were for Housing and Emergency Shelter. In total, 70,032 victims were served in one day. The unconscionable gap between need and resources only widens.

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 its doors 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 the life-saving support to domestic violence victims and their children.

Statistics – Effectiveness and Importance of VAWA & VOCA Grant Funding

- Historically, VOCA/VAWA grant funding more than 25% of Penelope House’s budget.

Penelope House’s Court Advocacy Program is funded by VOCA & VAWA. Its 2021 stats, which were all increases, yet still impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, for clients served were:

- Adult Clients: 8,251
- Children: 7,080

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf

⁷ NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DVSA-Fact-Sheet-July-2020.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 16th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report, accessed <https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/16th-Annual-Domestic-Violence-Counts-National-Summary-FINAL.pdf>

- Court Appointments with Clients: 6,761
- Clients Assisted to obtain protection from abuse or no contact orders: 1,358

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 grant funding has become increasingly important to Penelope House because its services were expanded to include more counties in Alabama.)

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 Administrative Assistant provides administrative support to Court/Victim Advocates and assistance to the Court Advocacy Supervisor. The assistant also collects and complies 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 victim 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 2021 service stats—again impacted due to the pandemic—were:

- Adults sheltered: 233
- Children sheltered: 252
- Total Client Service Hours: 4,226.24
- Total Nights of shelter provided: 5,989
- Crisis calls: 1,573
- Meals Served: 15,824

RECOMMENDATION

The Daughters of Penelope (DOP) 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 FY2023 to be set at least at \$2.65 billion and without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute, as rightfully proposed by the President's FY23 budget. The Fund 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 the Biden administration's strong investment request of \$1 billion for VAWA programs, at a minimum.

Clearly, as the missions of domestic violence centers across the country, such as Penelope House, have expanded into jurisdictions due to the unfortunate increased need to provide victims' services, the viability of VOCA and VAWA grants have become increasingly important to meet the victims' needs.

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