

# Written Testimony

## FY21 Funding: VAWA, VOCA Programs & Crime Victims Fund

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

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Chairman José Serrano, Ranking Member Robert Aderholt, 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 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**. Specifically, we request a **Crime Victims Fund** cap for FY2021 to be set at least at **\$2.65 billion** and without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute; and we support a strong investment of **\$601 million** for **VAWA** programs and for Congress to pass a strong bipartisan-backed reauthorization of VAWA.

### **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. According to the Department of Justice, in FY2017, state VOCA victim assistance grants supported an estimated 14,000 victims' services projects administered by nearly 7,800 public and community-based agencies in the United States.<sup>1</sup> These agencies 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, among many 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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/isd/page/file/1039211/download>, Page 58.

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, according to a previous statement of the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, "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 examples, the FY2020 appropriations year-end legislative package transferred \$435 million from the CVF to VAWA programs and the administration's FY2021 budget proposes a \$498.5 million transfer from the Fund to VAWA programs. We request the elimination of transfers that harm the Fund's long-term viability and ability to commit fully to crime victims. Another unfortunate ramification of allowing transfers from the Fund is that it causes politicization of the Fund. This is why in the past we have supported bipartisan-backed legislation (such as the **Crime Victims Fund Preservation Act of 2018** in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress) that creates a "lockbox" to ensure that money in the Fund cannot be used for anything other than victims' programs authorized under the VOCA statute and that permanently excludes the Crime Victims Fund from future government sequestration. 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)<sup>2</sup>:

- More than 1 in 3 women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Approximately 7.9 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), 2010-2012 State Report:

- In the United States, Intimate partner contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/ or stalking was experienced by 37.3% of U.S. women during their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>
- One in 4 women and 1 in 9 men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, accessed [https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Library\\_General\\_DV\\_SA\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://nnedv.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Library_General_DV_SA_Factsheet.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-infographic-2016.pdf>

- In 2015, 1270 women and men were murdered by an intimate partner (e.g. husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend).<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>
- Nationwide, an average of 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day.<sup>7</sup>
- Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence annually.<sup>8</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 there are many victims who still suffer in silence. A 2019 24-hour survey of domestic violence programs across the U.S. found that although 19,159 Hotline calls were answered (averaging more than 13 calls every minute). However, 11,336 requests for services (such as emergency shelter, transportation, or legal representation) went unmet because programs lacked the resources to provide them.<sup>9</sup> Sixty-eight percent of the unmet services were for Housing and Emergency Shelter. In total, 77,226 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.

Regarding Penelope House, it was the first of its kind 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**

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

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

<sup>7</sup> NNEDV Domestic Violence Fact Sheet, accessed <https://nnedv.org/mdocs-posts/domestic-violence-and-sexual-assault-factsheet/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> Annual National Domestic Violence Counts National Summary.

- **VOCA/VAWA grant funding comprised 30% of Penelope House's 2019 budget.**
- VOCA is the largest source of Penelope House's funding.

Penelope House's Court Advocacy Program is funded by VOCA & VAWA. It's stats for clients served are:

- Adult Clients: 7,202
- Children: 7,304
- Court Appointments with Clients: 5,795
- Clients Assisted to obtain protection from abuse or no contact orders: 1,340

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 Penelope House's services has been 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 2019 service stats are:

- Adults sheltered: 381
- Children sheltered: 483
- Total Client Service Hours: 13,219
- Total Nights of shelter provided: 9,417
- Crisis calls: 1,612
- Meals Served: 26,895

### **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 FY2020 to be set at least \$2.65 billion and without any transfers to programs not authorized under the VOCA statute; and we support a strong investment of \$601 million for VAWA programs. The Crime Victims Fund is not funded by taxpayer dollars. Therefore, the cap can be sustained or raised without adding to the national debt or deficit and transfers (or carve outs) must be eliminated in FY2021 and going forward.

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 the CVF and 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.