



March 22, 2010

The Honorable David Obey  
Chairman  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt  
Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alan Mollohan  
Chairman  
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Wolf  
Ranking Member  
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Obey, Chairman Mollohan, Ranking Member Tiahrt and Ranking Member Wolf:

We the undersigned organizations, represent millions of victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking throughout the United States and territories. On behalf of the victims we represent, we ask that you support full funding for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) programs and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) in the Labor, Health and Human Services Budget and VAWA criminal justice programs and raise the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) cap in the Commerce, Justice, Science Budget in FY '11.

For more than 25 years, VAWA, VOCA and FVPSA have made substantial progress toward ending domestic and sexual violence. These programs not only save lives but they also save money. Studies show that domestic violence has declined significantly since VAWA was first enacted in 1994, and VAWA alone is estimated to have saved taxpayers at least \$14.8 billion in net averted social costs in its first six years.

Yet, increased awareness of these crimes and an improved criminal justice response has created an increased demand for services. With the current state of the economy, victim service agencies struggle to handle the increased workload as more victims with fewer resources seek assistance. In fact, a recent survey conducted by Jewish Women International found that in 2009, economic factors including a victim and/or abuser's job loss and home foreclosure/eviction were reasons for increase demand for services. Exacerbating matters, during the FY '10 state fiscal cycle, governors in at least 12 states cut funding for domestic violence and sexual assault services—thereby causing safety net programs in those states to close or reduce services. During the FY '11 state fiscal cycle, the scope of state funding cuts is projected to increase.

We cannot allow the gap between available resources and desperate need to widen. The federal investment in these programs is needed now, more than ever. Congress took great strides in increasing funding last year and the President's FY '11 budget is a strong step in the right direction. While we urge your support for full funding for VAWA and FVPSA, we specifically ask for your support for the following programs, many of which were given substantial increases in President Obama's FY '11 Budget proposal.

## Commerce, Justice, Science Budget

### Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

VOCA uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund for several programs that serve victims of crime, including state formula victim assistance grants. These grants support services to 4 million victims of all types of crimes through 4,400 direct service agencies, such as domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and child abuse treatment programs. Although President Obama's FY '11 budget proposes raising the annual VOCA cap to \$800 million, it also recommends new and expanded funding set-asides (including an important \$100 million in additional funding for services for victims of violence against women) that reduce the amount otherwise available to support VOCA's core formula assistance grants. The Administration estimates that \$5.3 billion will be available in the Crime Victims Fund during FY '11 which is more than enough for the Fund's long-term viability. We strongly support a FY '11 VOCA cap of at least \$867 million to ensure that state VOCA victim assistance formula grants will be able to continue support for critical services to crime victims.

### Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors (STOP) Formula Grant Program

VAWA's STOP Grant Program is one of the most successful VAWA programs, helping hundreds of thousands of victims find safety and receive recovery services, and holding thousands of perpetrators accountable for their actions. As the largest program authorized in VAWA at \$225 million, it awards funds to every state and territory through a formula-based system. Many states use STOP funding to establish special units in law enforcement agencies and prosecutors' offices to address violence against women. Victims benefit from services including advocacy, crisis intervention, hotline call advocacy, counseling and support, victim-witness notification, shelter, and legal assistance. We support the proposal in President Obama's FY '11 budget which discontinues the practice of taking unauthorized set-asides out of STOP. In addition, we strongly support the funding of STOP at no less than last year's funding of \$189 million.

### Sexual Assault Services Program

The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) was created in the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act as the first dedicated funding source to address the needs of victims of sexual violence. Specifically, SASP provides funds for services such as hotlines, crisis intervention and advocacy and makes resources available to state, territorial and tribal sexual assault coalitions who work to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local rape crisis centers. According to a 2010 survey of rape crisis centers by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, 70 percent of programs have experienced a reduction in funding over the past year, 57 percent have experienced a reduction in staffing, 25 percent currently have a waiting list for services, and funding cuts have resulted in an overall 50 percent reduction in the provision of advocacy services. While authorized at \$50 million, \$15 million was appropriated for SASP in FY '10. Rape crisis centers need the fully authorized amount to hire advocates, eliminate waiting lists and respond to the unmet needs of victims. At the very least, however, we ask Congress to appropriate the President's recommended funding level of \$30 million.

### Civil Legal Assistance for Victims

The authorized VAWA Civil Legal Assistance program funds efforts to provide multifaceted legal representation for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Common legal matters affecting victims are related to civil protection orders, family court, immigration or property settlement. In order to successfully navigate the legal system, victims of intimate partner or gender-based violence need skilled legal representation. Yet, 70 percent of these victims navigate the legal without representation. In FY '10 Congress provided \$41 million for the Civil Legal Assistance program, \$24 million less than the authorized level. We strongly urge Congress to fund this program not lower than the President's proposed level of \$50 million.

### Transitional Housing

The authorized VAWA Transitional Housing program funds emergency shelters and array of social services for domestic violence and sexual assault victims. Safe and affordable housing is critical for victims and their families trying to rebuild their lives after escaping a violent environment. However, housing options are becoming increasingly scarce and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are staying longer in shelters. As a result, shelters are frequently full and must turn families away. This forces many victims to choose between homelessness or remain with their abusers. In FY '10 Congress provided \$18 million for the Transitional Housing program, \$22 million less than the authorized level. We strongly urge Congress to fund this critical program not lower than the President's proposed level of \$25 million.

### **Supporting Teens through Education and Prevention (STEP) program**

One in three teens report threats of violence, sexual assault, or physical abuse, and nearly one in four report being victimized by technology, according to a recent poll released by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) and Liz Claiborne Inc. Teens spend a significant portion of their lives in school, and teachers, coaches and counselors play essential roles in the lives of students. For this reason, the school setting could be the key to eliminating dating and sexual violence in the youth population. The VAWA STEP program helps schools educate personnel, develop policies and urge greater collaboration with community organizations. Due to the scope of the problem and opportunity to prevent future violence, we ask that Congress to include last year's funding of \$2.5 million.

### **Labor, Health and Human Services Budget**

#### **Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)**

The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) program supports lifesaving services including emergency shelters, crisis hotlines, counseling, and programs for underserved communities throughout the United States and territories. Administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, FVPSA is the only federal funding source dedicated to domestic violence shelters and programs. According to a report by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, in one day in 2009, more than 65,000 victims of domestic violence received services of which 50 percent sought emergency shelter. However, on that same day, over 9,000 adults and children were turned away due to lack of funding. In FY '10, Congress appropriated nearly \$131 million for FVPSA, which triggered spending for the first time dedicated to specialized services for children who witness domestic violence. FVPSA expired in 2008 and was authorized at \$175 million. The President's FY '11 Budget proposes to fund FVPSA at \$140 million, a \$10 million increase from FY '10 and \$35 million below the 2003 authorized level. We strongly urge Congress to fund FVPSA not lower than \$150 million.

#### **Violence Against Women Health Initiative**

This ten state initiative, through the Office of Women's Health at the Department of Health and Human Services, promotes public health programs that integrate domestic and sexual violence assessment and intervention into basic care. Congress has included the program in the last two fiscal years, but the funding has not been on top of the agency's overall budget. As a result, HHS has had to cut other violence prevention activities to fund the program. Funding is needed for its third year to identify the best practices, conduct general evaluation, and disseminate the results to the field so that victims nationwide can benefit. We strongly urge Congress to fund this program at \$2.3 million above the Office of Women's Health budget, at a minimum.

#### **Rape Prevention and Education (RPE)**

This VAWA program administered through CDC strengthens national, state and local sexual violence prevention efforts and the operation of rape crisis hotlines. RPE funding provides formula grants to states and territories to support rape prevention and education programs conducted by rape crisis centers, state sexual assault coalitions, and other public and private nonprofit entities. Funding also supports the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, which provides up-to-date information regarding sexual violence to policy-makers, federal and state agencies, college campuses, sexual assault and domestic violence coalitions, local programs, the media, and the general public. Despite its critical work, RPE has faced funding decreases since FY '06. Authorized at \$80 million, it was funded at \$42 million in FY '10. We strongly urge Congress to provide RPE with at least \$55 million.

#### **The National Domestic Violence Hotline**

For the past 15 years the Hotline has provided 24-hour, toll-free and confidential services – immediately connecting callers to local service providers. During this economic downturn, crisis calls to the Hotline have increased. Additionally, to address the specific needs of dating violence victims, the Hotline launched the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline, which has seen increased traffic recently. We strongly support the President's budget request of \$5 million.

We look forward to working with you to ensure adequate funding is appropriated for these vital programs, which are crucial investments in our communities that save lives, rebuild families, conserve resources, and prevent future crimes. For more information, please contact Monica McLaughlin, at the National Network to End Domestic Violence at [mmclaughlin@nnedv.org](mailto:mmclaughlin@nnedv.org), Sally Schaeffer at Family Violence Prevention Fund at [sally@endabuse.org](mailto:sally@endabuse.org), Michelle Freeman at Jewish Women International at [MFreeman@jwi.org](mailto:MFreeman@jwi.org), or Terri Poore at the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence at [tpoore@fcasv.org](mailto:tpoore@fcasv.org).

Sincerely,