

VOCA Cuts Present Threat to Services for Victims of Crime and Trauma

By Rose Frech, Assistant Director for Government Funding and Advocacy

Recent federal funding cuts are resulting in reductions in services across the state to victims of crime, including individuals who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

The Crime Victim's Fund was created through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) in 1984. The fund is financed by fines and penalties paid by individuals convicted of federal offenses, resulting in the distribution of billions of dollars each year to support victim assistance services and victim compensation. This money is allocated through the U.S. Department of Justice, and in part goes to the states via formula grants. In Ohio, the Attorney General's office distributes the funding to support local private providers and governments who provide a wide range of victim-assistance programming.

Through a complicated appropriations loophole, which includes a cap on annual allocations that can be made through the fund, legislators are able to redirect resources from the fund to other areas. This arrangement, in addition to a decline in large corporate settlements that have been critically important to maintaining the fund, have resulted in a significant decrease in available money.¹

Subsequently, Ohio has seen a substantial reduction in VOCA funding (approximately \$30 million in the most recent fiscal year distribution) with a potential for additional cuts in future years. As a result, hundreds of organizations across the state who serve victims of crime have experienced cuts, disrupting program operations and reducing the availability of services.²

The impact across Ohio, and in particular Northeast Ohio, was well-reported by Rachel Dissell for The Plain Dealer, who writes, "Hardest hit were Northeast Ohio agencies that provide direct support for domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking victims, and for trauma recovery services."³

At OhioGuidestone, VOCA provides essential funding to support residential treatment provided to victims of human trafficking as well as critically important support for our domestic violence shelters, serving families in Carroll and Tuscarawas counties. Recent funding cuts have impacted our programming significantly and resulted in staffing reductions at our shelters. As the only shelters operating in these rural, Appalachian counties, cuts in services are not likely to be absorbed by other providers, leaving a gap in an already under-resourced community.

Here at the Institute of Family and Community Impact, our focus is on building strong families and communities through a relational lens. We know that traumatic experiences lead to significant changes in physical and psychological functioning and can wreak havoc on relationships. Trauma that results from violence, especially when that violence comes at the hands of an intimate partner or other loved one, can be particularly harmful.

This can have ripple effects across families and neighborhoods. We believe that healing and recovering from trauma is possible, and many best-practice trauma-informed models are being deployed across the state to support survivors. VOCA funding provides a necessary ingredient to maintaining access to these services. Policymakers would be wise to look closely at the impact of these cuts in local communities, and identify strategies to address funding gaps to ensure all victims of crime receive the support they need to heal.

1. Sword, D. (2019, March 21). "Shrinking victims fund signals tough times for appropriators." *Roll Call*. <http://www.rollcall.com>
2. Warsmith, S., & McClory, E. (2019, Nov. 25). "Victim agencies scramble after loss of federal funding." *Record-Courier*. <http://www.record-courier.com>
3. Dissell, R. (2019, Nov. 26). "Grants to Ohio crime victim assistance programs cut by more than \$10 million as federal fund shrinks." *The Plain Dealer*. <http://www.cleveland.com>