

**Testimony for the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
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Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro and distinguished Members of the Committee: It is an honor to testify in support of a targeted \$253 million investment in funding for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) shelter and supportive services, and related Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) programs administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the FY 2016 Budget.

Domestic violence is in the national spotlight this year because of a high profile assault captured on video and the spotlight has encouraged our nation to reassess its efforts to prevent and end these degrading and life-threatening injustices. It has also meant that more victims are coming forward for help, at the same time that victim service providers are facing budget cuts. Advocates know that the deeply disturbing images from that elevator reflect the real, lived experiences of millions of survivors across this nation. We all know that ALL survivors should be able to flee such violence and abuse. I testify today to ask for the resources that will move us closer to that goal.

As the Executive Director of NorthWest Domestic Crisis Services for the last 24 years, I have developed an in-depth understanding of the issues facing victims of domestic violence and the advocates who serve them. I know that our experience is mirrored in shelters and programs across the country. My organization is in one of the most rural parts of the nation. NWDCS provides services to all victims in a ten county area of Oklahoma. It is 259 miles from one end of this service area to the other. We have a second shelter located 125 miles to the west, but it is still a significant distance for survivors across our vast region. While many generations of "Okies" have thrived there for a hundred years, the isolated communities keep many victims silent. One client's story has stayed with me for years. "Susan" called our hotline requesting assistance with a protective order. Her husband was threatening to kill her and their children. Our advocate

assisted Susan with obtaining a protective order for herself and three children. Susan was justifiably terrified to return home and decided to stay in our shelter. Her perpetrator was arrested but soon bonded out of jail. We assisted Susan with job skills and resume development, and she quickly obtained employment. Susan thrived in our support groups and we worked with her teenage children to better cope with the aftermath of abuse. Susan moved from shelter to our transitional living apartments where she continued to utilize our counseling and advocacy services for herself and her children to rebuild their lives after the abuse. The perpetrator continued to harass Susan and her children through text messages and he was finally caught and arrested in another state. He is still in jail for the violence, for numerous violations of the protective order, and for threats to their lives. Once he was incarcerated, Susan felt comfortable moving back to a location where she had family support and is very successful in her life. Susan increased her income while receiving services, her children are starting to graduate from high school, and occasionally she still contacts us to thank us and let us know that her life is good now.

Susan is just one of the 12 million people who are victims of domestic violence each year. Female victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner experienced severe impacts such as fear, concern for their safety, injury, need for medical care, need for housing services, and missing work or school.ⁱ The terrifying conclusion of domestic violence is often murder, and every day in the United States, an average of three women are killed by a current or former intimate partner.ⁱⁱ In fact, Oklahoma is ranked the 3rd highest in the country in its rate of murders of women by men, and 55% of those homicides are related to domestic violence. In addition to the terrible cost domestic and sexual violence have on the lives of individual victims and their families, these crimes cost taxpayers and communities. The cost of intimate partner violence exceeds \$5.8 billion each year, \$4.1 billion of which is for direct health care services.ⁱⁱⁱ Domestic violence costs U.S. employers an estimated \$3 to \$13 billion annually.^{iv} Despite this grim reality, we know that when a coordinated response is developed and immediate, essential services are available, victims can escape from life-threatening violence and begin to rebuild their lives.

Here are the specific requests I would make on behalf of survivors and advocates across the nation.

Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) (Administration for Children and Families) –

a \$175 million request. Since its passage in 1984 as the first national legislation to address domestic violence, FVPSA has remained the only federal funding directly for shelter programs. Now in its 30th year, FVPSA has made substantial progress toward addressing domestic violence. Despite the progress and success brought by FVPSA, a staggering and unacceptable need remains for FVPSA-funded victim services. There are more than 2,000 community-based domestic violence programs for victims and their children (approximately 1,500 of which are FVPSA-funded through state formula grants), like NorthWest Domestic Crisis Services. These programs offer services such as emergency shelter, counseling, legal assistance, and preventative education to millions of adults and children annually and are at the heart of our nation's response to domestic violence. A recent multi-state study conclusively shows that the nation's domestic violence shelters are addressing victims' urgent and long-term needs and are helping victims protect themselves and their children. This same study found that, if shelters did not exist, the consequences for victims would be dire, including homelessness, serious losses (including loss of children) and/or continued abuse or death."^v

There is an increased need for funding to maintain programs and bridge the gap. Many programs across the country use their FVPSA funding to keep the lights on and their doors open. We cannot overstate how important this funding is: victims must have a place to flee when they are escaping life-threatening violence. All roads lead to FVPSA. Meaning that increased attention to the issue, such as (1) increased training for law enforcement, prosecutors and court officials, (2) investments in homicide reduction programs and (3) efforts to increase screening and referral by healthcare and social service professionals, has led to a corresponding increase in demand for emergency shelter, hotlines, and supportive services.

Each year the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) releases a report entitled *Domestic Violence Counts: A 24-hr **National Census of Domestic Violence Services (Census)***^{vi}. The most recent report revealed that in just one day in 2014, while more than 67,000 victims of domestic violence received services, almost 10,000 requests for services went unmet, due to lack of funding and resources. On that one day in Oklahoma, our programs served over 800 victims but over 60 requests for services went unmet. While Susan was able to get the services she needed to escape the violence, many survivors are left without adequate support. In 2014, domestic violence programs across the country laid off nearly 1,400 staff positions including counselors, advocates and children's advocates and also had to reduce or completely eliminate over 1,800 services including emergency shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling. To learn more, you can read NNEDV's DV Counts Census (www.nnedv.org/census).

In FY '13, domestic violence programs funded by FVPSA provided shelter and non-residential services to over 1.3 million victims. Due to lack of capacity, however, victims of domestic violence made an additional 186,552 requests for shelter which went unmet. In Oklahoma, the requests for services from victims of domestic and sexual violence rose 10% between 2013 and 2014, and programs served over 10,000 survivors while turning away over 1,000 survivors. Our staff, which is already overworked and operating at maximum capacity, provided shelter and services for an additional 64 women and their children and provided an additional 817 residential days in our shelters. Fiscal year 2013 was also the first time in the history of this agency that we could not meet the requests for shelter services, and had to refer women and children to other programs to help them find safety. Numerous times we have to ask families to share their rooms with another victim in need, simply to keep her safe.

NWDCS and programs like us across the nation are desperate to do more for victims. First, we never want to have to turn a victim away from services when she or he has built the courage to come forward. Imagine a victim like Susan who has the potential to live a safe, violence-free life, but who cannot

do so because she could not get the help she needed. Fully funding FVPSA will help us move closer to that goal. Increasing FVPSA from \$135 million (current level) to \$175 million is a 30% increase which could result in an additional 390,000 victims served each year nationally. According to the DV Counts Census, the most frequently requested non-residential services that could not be provided in Oklahoma were housing, advocacy, and financial assistance, followed by legal representation and transportation. With additional funds, NWDCS could hire a legal services attorney to reduce the number of victims who have to face their abusers with no representation. We would also provide more housing advocacy, financial assistance and financial stability services, transportation and childcare. Additional FVPSA funds will also help bolster targeted, specific services to children to help break the cycle of violence.

In order to help meet the immediate needs of victims in danger, continue our progress toward preventing and ending domestic violence, and reducing societal costs, FVPSA funding must be increased to its authorized level of \$175 million.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS: Related programs at HHS work together to address domestic and sexual violence. These programs include the National Domestic Violence Hotline (ACF) (\$5 million) and CDC programs – DELTA Prevention Program (\$6 million), Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) (\$50 million) and the Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant, Rape Set-Aside (\$7 million).

ⁱ Breiding, M.J., Chen J., & Black, M.C. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Intimate Partner Violence: Attributes of Victimization, 1993-2011 (Special Report NCJ243300)

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2003.

^{iv} Bureau of National Affairs Special Rep. No. 32, Violence and Stress: The Work/Family Connection 2 (1990); Joan Zorza, *Women Battering: High Costs and the State of the Law*, Clearinghouse Rev., Vol. 28, No. 4, 383, 385.

^v Lyon, E. & Lane, S. (2009). Meeting survivors' needs: A multi-state study of domestic violence shelter experiences. Harrisburg, PA: National Resources Center on Domestic Violence.

^{vi} A 24-hr National Census of Domestic Violence Services, National Network to End Domestic Violence (*forthcoming Spring 2015*).