

**Testimony for the Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee
United States House of Representatives
Congressman Jim Costa, Representative of California's 16th District
February 28th, 2017**

Chairman Culberson, Ranking Member Serrano, and distinguished members of the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of federal funding for programs that provide vital resources for crime victims throughout the nation. I sincerely thank the Subcommittee for its ongoing support for these lifesaving programs.

As co-chair of the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, I am requesting the full authorized amount of \$568.5 million in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), full funding of at least \$20 million in the Victims of Child Abuse Act, and the release of \$2.57 billion from the Crime Victims Fund, which is the three year average of funds deposited into the Crime Victims Fund, administered by the U.S. Department of Justice in the FY 2018 Budget.

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Since its passage in 1994, VAWA has been the cornerstone of our nation's response to domestic violence. VAWA allows for a coordinated response from law enforcement, victim service providers, the criminal justice system, and the civil legal justice system. This coordination encourages best practices and has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of homicides and a coordinated response that held offenders accountable. Federal funds help leverage state dollars to provide the programs necessary to reduce violence against women to be part of state budgets.

The crimes of domestic and sexual violence are pervasive, insidious and life-threatening.

The National Network to End Domestic Violence's (NNEDV) *Domestic Violence Counts* (the Census), a 24-hour national snapshot of domestic violence services, revealed that in just one day, 72,959 victims of domestic violence received services; over 11,991 requests for services went unmet due to lack of funding and resources. That same year, domestic violence programs reported that they had laid off nearly 1,200 staff positions. Of the staff members that were laid off 61% were direct service positions, such as case managers, advocates, shelter staff, and child advocates. Programs also reduced or eliminated 935 services in the past year ranging from prevention services, therapy, to child welfare advocacy. According to a survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, more than 1/3 (39%) of the nation's 1,300 rape crisis centers have a waiting list for critical services while over 40% have faced a reduction in staffing over the past year. Moreover, over 1/4 of rape crisis centers had to decrease the number of prevention education services due to insufficient funding while almost 20% of programs could not provide services within one month of a request.

For those individuals who are not able to find safety, the consequences can be dire, including homelessness and life-threatening violence. 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.

Victims of Child Abuse Act

Children's Advocacy Centers provide an efficient, cost-effective mechanism for handling cases of severe child abuse and are strongly supported by law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary. The funding this program receives through the appropriations process goes directly to local Children's Advocacy Centers around the country in the form of grants for program support, and for training and technical assistance. Since 1992, the Committee's funding has enabled the establishment of close to 800 Children's Advocacy Centers in communities across the

country. The number of children helped by Children's Advocacy Centers has almost tripled from 100,539 in 2000 to more than 324,000 in 2016.

Children's Advocacy Centers are community-based public-private partnerships that emphasize the coordination of child abuse investigations and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team. Professionals from law enforcement, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocacy agencies, medical and mental health professionals all play a role in the process.

The primary mission of a Children's Advocacy Center is to prevent further victimization by ensuring that investigations are comprehensive and meet the age appropriate needs of the child. Communities that use CACs and multidisciplinary teams not only save critical taxdollars (\$1000 per case per child), but they also have a 94% conviction rate for CAC cases that are carried forward, and child victims of sexual abuse are four times more likely to receive forensic medical exams and increased referrals for mental health treatment than children served by non-CAC communities.

Children's Advocacy Centers can be found in every type of community including rural, urban, and suburban. They can also be found on Native American Tribal Reservations. Children's Advocacy Centers provide services to children from birth to age 18 with close to 40% of the children younger than 6 years old.

Victims of Crime Act

Since 1984, the Victims of Crime Act has provided federal grants to provide essential, often lifesaving services for crime victims. The Crime Victims Fund is not financed by taxpayer dollars but by fines, forfeitures, and other penalties paid by federal criminal offenders. By statute, the Fund is dedicated solely to supporting victim services. Because these non-tax dollars

have already been collected and deposited into the Fund, raising the cap does not add to the national deficit or debt.

Every year, state VOCA victim assistance grants provide vital, direct assistance that supports thousands of public and community-based agencies nationwide in providing services to more than 3.7 million victims of assault, murder, robbery, gang violence, intoxicated drivers, fraud, elder abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, stalking, and many other crimes. Additionally, VOCA supports victim assistance for those involved in the federal criminal justice system, including survivors of terrorist acts. VOCA also helps victims with financial assistance for medical care, mental health counseling, lost wages, and funeral and burial costs through VOCA victim compensation grants.

Maintaining the VOCA funding level is essential to responsible and efficient management of victim service programs. Since VOCA funding increased, states have been engaged in long-term planning to best meet victims' needs in their respective jurisdictions by conducting needs assessments, strategic planning, surveys, and discussions with stakeholder groups. State VOCA assistance programs have been committed to using the increased funding as "catch-up" to existing programs, outreach to additional programs that had not previously received VOCA support, an increase in support for victim advocates, and enhanced training and infrastructure and technology improvements. Adopting a policy of setting the annual VOCA cap at least at the average of the last three-year deposits will facilitate long-term planning and stability in support of victim services. I request that the amounts in the Crime Victims Fund be used solely for programs authorized under the VOCA statute.

I also would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the Kirk Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program at the Department of Justice, National Institute of

Justice, the Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grant Program at the National Institute of Justice, and the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program. The Bloodsworth Post-Conviction DNA Testing Program supports states and localities that want to pursue post-conviction DNA testing in appropriate cases. The program does not directly fund the work of local innocence organizations, but instead focuses on state and local applicants, including law enforcement agencies, crime laboratories, and others – often in collaboration with each other, as well as with local innocence organizations. The Bloodsworth program is a powerful investment for states seeking to free innocent individuals and to identify the true perpetrators of crime. The Coverdell Program provides state and local crime laboratories and medical examiner offices with much needed federal funding to carry out their work both efficiently and effectively. As forensic science budgets find themselves on the chopping block in many states and localities, and as federal bodies recommend the implementation of new policies, standards, and guidelines, the Coverdell funds are critical to ensure that crime labs can function both efficiently and effectively. The Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program assists states with desperately needed help and resources to carry out DNA analyses of backlogged evidence, particularly rape kits.

I understand that this is again an extremely difficult budget year and I want to thank the Subcommittee for consistently funding programs that provide lifesaving services for victims and survivors throughout the United States. Your consideration of these requests will help ensure the long-term continuity of essential crime victim assistance services.