

Testimony of Congressman Ted Poe (TX-02)
before the House Commerce, Justice and Science Committee

February 28, 2017

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of two laws that provide critical resources and assistance to crime victims: the Crime Victims Fund and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). As a former judge and prosecutor and the co-founder and chairman of the Congressional Victims' Rights Caucus, I know how important it is to protect and help restore the most vulnerable in our society. Although both of these federal programs are fundamentally different in how they are funded and administered by the federal government, I am here today to ask you to *not* cut funding to either one.

In 1984, Congress created and President Reagan signed the Crime Victims Fund in the bipartisan Victims of Crime Act or VOCA. Since then, the Fund has been the lifeblood of victim service providers all over the country. Back then, this Fund was a novel idea. Convicted federal felons pay fees and fines into the Fund, which then helps pay for services to restore victims of crime. The Fund helps pay restitution to victims; it allows domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and other organizations to keep their doors open; and it pays for a wide array of services that crime victims need, from rape kits to beds in a shelter. I want to be clear: this is **not** taxpayer money. This fund allows criminals to pay for the harm that they've caused. In other words, it's like criminals paying rent on the courthouse.

At the end of FY2015, the Crime Victims Fund had a balance of more than \$12 billion. Unfortunately, this money - billions of dollars – has been used as an offset for other unrelated

programs. I understand the attraction of using a program of this size to help offset other items under the budget, but it is still completely inappropriate. These are non-tax dollars. To ensure that the Fund is protected and used correctly, Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) and I have introduced the Crime Victims' Fund Preservation Act. This bill creates a "lockbox" to ensure that money in the Fund cannot be used for any purpose other than crime victims' programs authorized under the VOCA statute.

I also ask that you protect a separate but similarly critical source of funding for victim services: the grant programs authorized under the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act or VAWA. In March of 2013, VAWA was reauthorized and continued efforts to help survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, stalking, and dating violence. This important legislation, which I was proud to support, also increased funding for investigations and prosecutions of violent crimes against women, provided restitution for victims and strengthened programs to transform victims of crime to survivors of crime.

Unlike programs funded through the Crime Victims Fund, VAWA grants are primarily funded by tax dollars. I am a strong supporter of reducing federal spending, but VAWA funding is far too important to individual Americans, families, and our communities to be included in those efforts. Full funding for VAWA is a needed investment in our communities that will save lives, rebuild families and prevent future crimes. VAWA has been the cornerstone of our nation's response to domestic violence, and despite incredible achievements, an unconscionable need remains for victim services. The progress and promise of VAWA can only be fulfilled if the programs receive continued investment through the appropriations process. The STOP grant program helps local and state communities better coordinate with the criminal justice system and creates a cohesive response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

The Sexual Assault Services Program is the federal government's only funding source dedicated to sexual assault services and funds rape crisis centers in every state. Vital tax money distributed through other VAWA grants support lifesaving legal services, transitional housing and housing vouchers, law enforcement support and homicide reduction initiatives, services for underserved minor and elderly populations, and projects addressing courts and visitation. All of the services that VAWA supports work together to provide critical resources to help law enforcement arrest perpetrators of domestic violence and restore their victims. I urge you to support full funding for these and all VAWA programs as you work on the FY 18 CJS appropriations bill.

Crime victims do not have high dollar lobbyists here in Washington, DC. They look to their Representatives – their Members of Congress - to be their voice and to advocate on their behalf. They are victims because of someone else's actions and they should not be re-victimized by a system that leaves them without places to turn for help, for care, and for rebuilding their lives.