

Engaging Community Support

VICTIMS OF CRIME NEED YOUR HELP

February 24, 2009

[Recipient Name]

[Company Name]

[Street Address]

[City, State ZIP Code]

Dear [Recipient Name]:

As a (domestic violence, rape crisis, MADD, comprehensive....) program providing services for victims of crime, we wish to draw your attention to the critical importance to victims, to the community, and to our justice system of the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund.

VOCA was enacted by Congress in 1984 as a vital, non-taxpayer funding source for states to provide money for services and compensation to help victims of crime and their families cope with the trauma and aftermath of all types of crimes.

VOCA funding consists of fines and penalties collected from federal offenders, not money collected from taxpayers. VOCA dollars are distributed by formula grant to every U.S. state and territory to support grants to local victim services programs for victim support, shelter, crisis intervention, counseling, court accompaniment, advocacy, and other services in the aftermath of crime. Across the nation, these offender penalties support a significant portion of victim assistance provided by local victim service programs, as does (agency).

In 2000, Congress placed a cap on the amount released from the VOCA Fund in order to ensure that a stable level of funding remains available for use to fund crime victim programs in future years. However, since 2004, the cap on the amount released has been lower than the amount of deposits into the Fund, thereby holding back more than \$1.430 billion collected for the Fund.

Despite the substantial surpluses in the VOCA Fund, the amount released has dwindled, then been cut dramatically. In 2008 the cap on funds released was decreased by \$35 million – from \$625 million in 2007 to \$590 million in 2008 – while the amount of deposits into the fund was \$1.017 billion dollars just in 2008.

As the VOCA Fund balance has grown, so has the demand for victim services. At present, the balance in the VOCA fund stands at nearly four times the amount released annually by Congress. In the meantime, victim services providers are struggling to make ends meet in the face of skyrocketing operating costs and a struggling economy.

This has reached a critical point in 2009. Based on proposed VOCA allocations for 2009, victim programs in Pennsylvania are now facing devastating budget cuts close to 20%. If immediate action isn't taken to release this critical funding, cuts will mean the elimination of core services and in some cases the closing of doors for victim service agencies.

We need your assistance in urging our leaders in Washington to release a significantly larger portion of these funds, if our services are to continue at the same level. We are not asking for taxpayer dollars. We are asking that the funds collected to support our programming be released to do just that.

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Crime victims will not go away just because the funding does. They will look to someone for services if victim service providers no longer have the resources to assist them. An impact of this nature would put a huge burden on the already financially strained criminal justice system and social service providers in our community.

As a vital stakeholder in our community (and/or criminal justice system), we need your support. We are in the process of sending a unified message (see attached) to our leaders in Washington about the vital importance of releasing more of these VOCA funds. Please join in this effort by sending a letter or passing a resolution to add your voice to our pleas.

For more information you may contact me at

Sincerely,