

Funding - Rape Crisis Centers and BRFA cuts 2025.

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Position: FWA



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Reports from Rape Crisis Centers Across Maryland

Testimony Regarding HB352

**Opposing Proposed Reductions to
Victim Services Stabilization Act Funding**

February 27, 2025

Thursday February 20, 2025

The Devastating Impact of Cutting Funding for Sexual Assault Survivors

Cutting funding for sexual assault survivors is a short-sighted and harmful decision that undermines the safety, recovery, and well-being of countless individuals. Survivors of sexual violence rely on critical support services, including crisis hotlines, counseling, legal assistance, medical care, and emergency housing. Reducing or eliminating funding for these essential resources not only jeopardizes their recovery but also sends a disturbing message that their experiences and needs are not a priority.

Sexual assault is a deeply traumatic experience that leaves lasting physical, emotional, and psychological scars. Survivors often struggle with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, making access to trauma-informed care crucial. Funding cuts can force support organizations to reduce staff, limit services, or even shut down, leaving survivors without the help they desperately need. This can lead to increased suffering, higher healthcare costs, and a greater likelihood of homelessness and job instability for survivors who lack access to critical assistance.

Beyond the direct impact on survivors, funding cuts also hinder efforts to prevent sexual violence in the first place. Many organizations use federal and state grants to run education and prevention programs, which help communities understand consent, recognize warning signs of abuse, and create safer environments. Without adequate funding, these programs disappear, increasing the likelihood that sexual violence will continue at alarming rates.

Furthermore, reducing funding for survivors disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants, and people with disabilities. These groups already face systemic barriers to justice and healthcare, and cutting support services further isolates them. For many, specialized programs tailored to their unique needs are the only places they can safely seek help without fear of discrimination or retaliation.

Legal advocacy is another crucial area that suffers from funding cuts. Many survivors struggle to navigate the complex legal system and seek justice against their perpetrators. Victim advocacy groups provide free legal assistance, accompany survivors to court, and help them obtain protective orders. Without financial support, these services dwindle, leaving survivors to face legal battles alone and often discourage them from coming forward at all.

The cost of sexual violence extends beyond individual survivors, it affects entire communities and the economy. Studies show that sexual assault leads to billions of dollars in lost productivity, medical expenses, and legal costs. Supporting survivors is not just a moral obligation; it is an economic necessity. When survivors receive timely support, they are more likely to heal, re-enter the workforce, and contribute positively to society. Conversely, when they are abandoned by the system, the burden falls on emergency rooms, social services, and law enforcement agencies that are ill-equipped to handle long-term trauma.

Cutting funding for sexual assault survivors is not just an issue of dollars and cents it is a matter of human dignity, safety, and justice. Survivors deserve support, not abandonment. As a society, we must ensure that those who have endured such profound violations are met with compassion, care, and the resources they need to heal and rebuild their lives.



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To: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

From: Heather L. Hanline, MS, LCPC, Executive Director

Testimony Regarding Potential State of Maryland Budget Cuts

2025

In the Appalachian Mountains of westernmost Maryland, the Dove Center operates, protecting and serving survivors of domestic and sexual violence across the second largest county in Maryland. The county covers 657 square miles of rural, agrarian territory, and includes Deep Creek Lake and Wisp Resort, a popular tourist destination. The County has a population of approximately 30,000 during times when tourists populate Deep Creek Lake.

Globally and locally, the pandemic created the perfect storm for domestic violence, isolating victims from access to vital services, and giving abusers ultimate power and control. This has culminated in the following: Increased demand; increased complexity and dangerousness of cases (requiring an increase in specialized skills, implementation of new and specialized services and staffing); increased demand on staff, therefore requiring higher salaries; increased training needs; and increased prevention needs.

Comparing a period of services in the current year, to the same period last year, the number of services provided increased 52%. We continue to see a dramatic change in the complexity of needs of clients we are serving. Many are now experiencing severe substance use disorder, untreated mental health diagnoses, housing and job challenges, and more. In a recent local meeting addressing mental health needs, it was reported that there are 570 individuals in need of mental health services per 1 mental health professional in Garrett County. Therefore, our referral sources are very limited, with waiting lists of several months. This creates an internal need for further training on Mental Health First Aid, peer support workers, and other specialized skills. It also means that more is expected of our front-line staff in terms of responsibilities and skills than what their current salary is paying. Our entry level crisis advocate positions pay less than the local Walmart cashier positions, which are by far less demanding.

Garrett County has been faced with the long-term, seemingly insurmountable challenge of developing a sustainable Forensic Nurse Examiner Program. For nearly 30 years, we have cycled through nurses who obtain certification for short amounts of time, leaving the county without this vital service, and adding to survivor's cumulative trauma by requiring a one-two

hour commute to receive a forensic exam. This past year, the Dove Center has worked closely with the Garrett County Health Department to develop a new model for a local FNE program, which we believe will be sustainable in our unique, rural service area. We now have three nurses trained in adult and pediatric exams. We recently obtained grant funds and have been successful in purchasing new, state of the art FNE equipment to be housed in a trauma informed exam room at the Garrett County Health Department. This is a major success as this newly reimagined program develops. However, with this new service will come new service demands, and higher numbers across all programs the Dove Center offers. This could be severely jeopardized by the proposed budget cuts, at a time that we are finally on the verge of filling a major service gap in our County.

Please consider these recent stories of survivors that have been assisted by our programs:

A victim arrives at the agency, pregnant, with a baby on her hip. She tells her story of constant abuse, rape, and gaslighting at the hands of her abuser, who uses his connections with the military to convince her that she'll never be believed or supported. She is ready to leave. He harasses her day in and day out. She hesitates to block his contact due to her child. He convinces her to meet him various times off-site, where he rapes her again and again. She returns to shelter each time, and her visits with him become more infrequent. She begins to gain a bit more mental strength as contact with the abuser lessens.

A hotline call comes in. A woman is in another city in Maryland. She is being trafficked, tracked, abused in every way. She is in a situation so dire, she sees no way out. She cannot find safe housing in any county, and has been denied shelter repeatedly. She needs to be close to the US Embassy for assistance. Dove Center clearly does not have the resources needed to protect her in our residential facilities, as she has a tracker on her car and phone. However, we work feverishly for three solid days to connect her with other valuable resources such as the Human Trafficking Prevention Project, CHANA, Maryland Human Trafficking Task force, other Regional Navigator Programs, and extensive support services. We do not leave her empty handed or alone.

A mother arrives in the Dove Center parking lot, nervously unloading her two toddlers from the car, and looking over her shoulder. Earlier in the day, she loaded them and a few belongings in her car and fled from a highly dangerous abuser with known gang affiliation, who had tracked her down several times before. She left with no destination, driving for her life, for several hours. She stopped at an unfamiliar Walmart to purchase diapers. When walking to her car, a stranger in the parking lot noticed that she was distraught and offered to help. The mother told the stranger a bit about her story, and the stranger responded, "You need to get to the Dove Center, they'll help you.", and proceeded to give her driving directions. She arrived to open arms and an open door. She spent the next three months overcoming many obstacles, including her abusers efforts to attempt to track her through his local police department. During her stay, she engaged in trauma informed psychoeducational counseling, received extensive legal advocacy, was able to save money and learn to budget, learned valuable parenting skills, created a safety plan, and found independent housing for herself and children.

The hotline rings, and it is an agency in Philadelphia. They have a victim with two children who must leave the area immediately for safety. Her abuser had found her again, and assaulted her in the parking lot. She could not be kept safe in her area. A great deal of effort takes place to find safe transportation for the victim and her children for the 5 hour trip from Philadelphia to Garrett County, Maryland (she had received denials of entry from shelter upon shelter in between). As her shelter stay progresses, the severity of trauma that she and her children have experienced begins to unfold, and is unthinkable. She lives in constant fear of being tracked. Financial and other barriers tempt her to return to the abusive environment that is at least familiar. However, she perseveres. She and her children both receive comprehensive services and eventually move into a safe, affordable apartment, and begin their new lives.

As we watch the scope of need change and expand, we must change, improve and expand to meet that need. In order to do so, we must be able to function with the certainty of stable funding, which should be not only level, but with reasonable increase to meet the needs of survivors.

It is vital that the State of Maryland consider the catastrophic consequences that decreased funding will cause for survivors and the programs that serve them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Heather L. Hanline".

Heather L. Hanline, MS, LCPC

Executive Director

Life Crisis Center, Inc.
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Salisbury, MD 21803
Business: 410-749-0632
Fax: 410-548-9496

February 24, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

The Life Crisis Center (LCC) has a clear mission and vision: "To improve the quality of life through crisis intervention and violence prevention." We provide critical lifesaving services to victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and human sex trafficking by providing a safe place, advocacy, resources, and hope in Worcester, Wicomico, and Somerset Counties.

Proposed budget cuts to victim services would negatively impact LCC's ability to provide critical services such as a 24-hour crisis line, medical and legal accompaniment for sexual assault victims at hospitals and courts, trauma counseling, support groups, and safe house accommodations for adult victims and their children. LCC continues to face challenges with hiring and retaining qualified staff. The level of violence occurring in some cases is taking an emotional toll on the staff involved, leading to higher rates of burnout and the need for additional supervision, EAP, and supportive services for staff. In one of our cases, a Child Therapist is working with a 4-year-old victim that was sexually abused by a brother who also witnessed his brother murder their other sibling. This case alone has been challenging for the Child Therapist and it's just one of an endless stream of referrals for complex violence happening in homes in the tri-county. Grant funding has not kept up with inflation and the mandatory increase in minimum wage. Our team members put their own wellbeing in jeopardy, being exposed to this vicarious trauma and we at the minimum need to compensate them accordingly to meet their own basic needs. LCC has reviewed local salary surveys and found it difficult to remain competitive on the shore because these jobs are demanding as shown in the example. Constant turnover of critical positions impacts client services, it is a vicious cycle that could be solved with increased, sustained, and predictable funding.

When funds are available for victim services we can have success for our future generations. It is critical that we have skilled professionals respond to situations like these for positive outcomes:

* A 31-year-old female, secondary victim of child physical abuse and a sexual assault survivor. At intake, she was suicidal and required inpatient care. After engaging in consistent therapy, the client reported an increased ability to manage suicidal thoughts and an improved self-concept. She shared that starting treatment at LCC stopped her from committing suicide and gave her hope.

* A positive outcome was the conviction of L's sexual abuse maltreater. It took three trials due to mistrials and complications, but L became stronger and found her voice with the help of her LCC therapist. She reports feeling supported, believed, and safer. She also protected her younger sisters from him.

* A 15-year-old female, a child sexual abuse survivor, completed trauma therapy using EMDR techniques. The teen reported significant improvement in symptoms and resolution of trauma-specific

To improve the quality of life in our community through crisis intervention and violence prevention

A United Way Agency Serving Wicomico, Worcester, & Somerset Counties

issues. She is now a full-time student, working, and has plans, having found peace and meaning in life.

*A 5-year-old female, survivor of child sexual abuse by her father, experienced significant reduction in anxiety, intrusive memories, and regressive behavior.

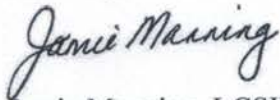
*A 33-year-old female, molested as a child, completed EMDR therapy. She initially met the criteria for PTSD, Generalized Anxiety, and Major Depressive Disorder, presenting with significant depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, low self-esteem, and post-traumatic symptoms. Upon completing treatment, her physical symptoms improved, her anxiety became manageable, and she no longer met the criteria for Depression or PTSD. She reported feeling safe and loved for the first time. She found meaning in her past experiences, began advocating for her health, and completed a U Visa application, which had previously felt overwhelming.

Threatened budget cuts would be detrimental in retaining qualified staff to do this life-saving work!

This funding must not only remain consistent but also increase appropriately to ensure we can effectively support the rising number of individuals in need. Budget cuts would severely hinder our ability to provide these critical services, putting the well-being and safety of countless victims at risk. It is vital that we maintain and strengthen our resources to ensure survivors receive the comprehensive care and advocacy they deserve.

We seek to empower victims to become survivors, and we strive to give child victims part of their childhood back.

Sincerely,



Jamie Manning, LCSW-C, CNP

Executive Director



February 21, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of HopeWorks of Howard County, I am writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed budget cuts to the Victim Services Stabilization Act (VOCA stabilization). These cuts threaten the critical services that survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence rely on every day.

Since our founding in February 1978, HopeWorks has been a vital resource for survivors in Howard County, offering comprehensive trauma-informed services that promote healing, safety, and justice. Over the past several years, the demand for our services has increased significantly, with survivors facing more complex barriers to safety and stability. Any reduction in funding would have devastating consequences for our ability to meet these growing needs.

The Critical Role of VOCA Funding

Through VOCA funding, HopeWorks has been able to:

- Operate a 24-hour crisis hotline, ensuring survivors can reach an advocate at any time.
- Provide emergency shelter and housing advocacy to survivors fleeing abuse.
- Offer free trauma-informed counseling to help survivors heal.
- Support survivors through legal advocacy, assisting with protective orders, divorce, and custody cases.
- Conduct hospital accompaniment services, ensuring survivors of sexual assault receive compassionate support during forensic exams.
- Implement prevention education and outreach to break the cycle of violence in our community.

The Impact of Funding Cuts on Staffing & Service Delivery

While demand for services has increased, funding has not kept pace with the rising cost of living or inflationary pressures. This directly impacts our ability to recruit and retain staff, forcing us into a cycle of turnover and burnout that compromises the quality and continuity of care for survivors.

- **Recruitment & Retention Challenges:** Grant funding limitations prevent us from offering competitive salaries, making it difficult to attract and retain skilled professionals. Many of our dedicated staff leave for higher-paying positions elsewhere, not because they lack passion for the work, but because they cannot afford to stay in a field that does not provide sustainable wages.
- **High Turnover, High Burnout:** When staff resign due to low wages, existing employees must take on additional responsibilities, leading to burnout. The process of recruiting, hiring, and training replacements can take months, stretching resources thin and delaying services for survivors.

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hopeworksofhc.org



- **Service Gaps & Staff Fatigue:** Consistent turnover disrupts survivor support services, forcing remaining staff to work longer hours and manage larger caseloads. Without adequate funding, organizations like ours cannot build the stability needed to maintain a strong, experienced team.

Survivor Impact Story

To illustrate the life-saving impact of our services, I share the experience of a survivor we recently supported:

After years of enduring domestic violence and repeated sexual assaults by her partner, a survivor reached out to HopeWorks for help. She had been financially controlled, isolated from her support system, and was afraid to leave. Through our legal advocacy program, she secured a protective order, gained access to our emergency shelter, and received our counseling services to help her process her trauma. With ongoing support, she was able to rebuild her life, regain her independence, and find permanent housing for herself and her children. Without these critical services, she might not have been able to escape the abuse.

Urgent Call to Action

Survivors should never have to worry about whether life-saving support will be available when they need it. The demand for victim services continues to rise, and reducing funding now would be catastrophic. We urge the State of Maryland to protect and sustain VOCA funding to ensure that no survivor is left without access to the support, advocacy, and resources they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ngozi Obineme".

Ngozi Obineme

Executive Director

HopeWorks of Howard County, Inc.



FOR ALL SEASONS

Behavioral Health & Rape Crisis Center

— help • hope • healing —

MEMO

To: To Whom it May Concern

From: Beth Anne Dorman, President & CEO

Re: Potential Budget for Sexual Assault and Rape Crisis Services

Date: February 24, 2025

I am writing today to implore your support in securing critical funding for For All Seasons and all certified Rape Crisis Centers across the state of Maryland. For All Seasons is the largest mental health and the only Rape Crisis Center serving the five counties of Maryland's mid-shore. We are an organization that provides essential, life-saving services to victims of sexual violence in our community. Without this funding, the services that so many depend on—crisis intervention, safe housing, medical and forensic care, therapeutic support, and advocacy—will be at risk, leaving victims without the resources they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

For All Seasons serves as a vital resource for survivors of sexual violence, working across all sectors of our community to ensure that victims have immediate, compassionate, and professional assistance when they need it most. Last year alone, our center provided care to over 3,450 member of our community, including children who suffered the trauma of sexual abuse. Our trained advocates, therapists, and medical professionals offer confidential and trauma-informed support to those who have endured the highest level of violation.

Consider what would have happened to Maria, a young girl who was being molested by her father and her brother beginning at the age of 3 years old. After 5 years for being the victim of child sexual abuse, a school counselor reached out to the local department of social services and they called our Rape Crisis Center. For All Seasons stayed by the side of the victim through the medical exam – working closely with the Sexual Assault Response Nurse, the advocate provided support during the law enforcement interviews, worked with the Social Services team to ensure that she was placed in a safe foster home and remained in every step of the process throughout the court case. The child is in engaged in therapy services at our office and For All Seasons is able to give her the trauma expertise needed to help her work through all that has been done to her. Maria's life depends on services being available.

The consequences of sexual violence are profound and far-reaching. Without proper intervention, victims face long-term emotional, psychological, and physical harm. Children who have been molested may go without services, leading to lifelong trauma. Victims who cannot access counseling or advocacy may struggle to find a path to healing. Nurses trained in forensic



FOR ALL SEASONS

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medical care cannot assist victims when immediate medical attention and evidence collection are critical for justice. Without safe housing, victims fleeing their abusers have nowhere to turn.

Cuts to funding would devastate our ability to provide these crucial services. It would mean fewer crisis advocates to answer hotline calls, fewer trained professionals to support victims in hospitals, and fewer therapists available to guide survivors through the healing process. The ripple effect would extend to families, schools, workplaces, and the broader community, increasing rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse, and homelessness.

We must stand together to ensure that no survivor is left without help. Rape crisis services are not optional—they are essential. With your support, we can continue to provide survivors with the care and resources they deserve. I urge you to prioritize funding for these critical services and protect the most vulnerable members of our community.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to the safety and well-being of all Maryland residents.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth Anne Dorman
President & CEO



24/hr Helpline: 443-279-0379

TurnAround's Written Testimony in Support of The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy Budget with Amendments

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy Budget with amendment to maintain the total \$60 million in the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding in the Maryland budget. As someone who works closely with victims of crime, I have seen firsthand how essential these funds are in providing critical services to those in crisis.

TurnAround has experienced a **16% increase in the number of individuals seeking victim services over the past year** and a **48% increase in direct assistance for survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual violence**, demonstrating the growing demand for trauma-informed care, emergency assistance, legal advocacy, and counseling. This surge in need makes continued VOCA funding not just important but essential to ensuring survivors receive the support they deserve.

VOCA funds our crisis-based programming including our 24/7 helpline, emergency shelter, and rape crisis support. It is a lifeline to survivors fleeing imminent danger, including each family represented in the **10,000 calls TurnAround received last year**. In fact, we saw a nearly **30% increase in calls** in the first 2 quarters of our fiscal year compared to last year. The need is increasing not decreasing.

These are mothers leaving abusive relationships in the middle of the night and college rape victims trying to figure out what hospital to go to for a rape kit.

Moreover, ongoing **federal uncertainty surrounding funding** poses a significant risk to Maryland's ability to sustain these vital services. While efforts have been made at the federal level to stabilize the Crime Victims Fund, the unpredictable nature of these allocations and the funding freezes threatened by the current federal administration means that Maryland must take proactive steps to safeguard funding at the state level. Without this support, many organizations will face devastating cuts, forcing them to reduce services or turn away victims in need.

We cannot afford to let survivors fall through the cracks. I urge you to prioritize maintaining VOCA funding in Maryland's budget to protect the thousands of crime victims who rely on these life-saving services.

Thank you for your time and commitment to supporting crime victims in our state.

To: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual
Assault

From: Christine Cooley, Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Program Manager

Testimony Regarding Potential State of Maryland Budget Cuts in 2025

According to nationwide statistics gathered by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Breiding et al, 2014), 1 in 5 women in the U.S. have experienced rape and 1 in 4 have experienced unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime. On a local level, there were 33,032 domestic violence crimes reported statewide in 2022, including 27,337 assaults (Maryland State Police, 2022). Additionally, 2,055 incidents of rape were reported to Maryland law enforcement, 244 of which occurred in Prince George's County. A five-year average of rape cases reported between 2018 – 2022 shows that Prince George's County residents continue to experience the fourth-highest number of rapes reported in Maryland (behind Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Montgomery County).

Following the point of victimization, crimes of sexual assault and domestic violence produce significant harms to all aspects of a survivor's wellbeing. Survivors carry physical injuries, chronic pain, gynecological issues, and other poor health outcomes as a direct result of the abuse they experienced. Beyond these physical signs of trauma, survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence also have increased likelihood of experiencing anxiety, depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, and other mental health disorders related to substance use, eating, and sleep (Pemberton and Loebb, 2020). These various negative physical and mental health outcomes ultimately present critical healthcare concerns that must be addressed before domestic violence and sexual assault victims can achieve health, safety, and stability, but such services often come at a high price for victims and their families. Some survivors may seek criminal justice response against their abusers as a form of healing from their traumas; however, many survivors encounter stigmatization, victim-blaming, or general distrust in response to the testimonies they provide to law enforcement and criminal justice officials (Ullman, 2010). For many, such negative responses from systems supposedly designed to protect them can leave survivors with a sense of re-victimization. In one historic study, over half of participating survivors revealed that their interaction with law enforcement was more harmful than the assault that caused them to seek support in the first place (Campbell et al., 2001).

The Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Center (DV/SAC) is the Certified Rape Crisis Center for Prince George's County, housed at the University of Maryland Capital Region Health (UMCRH) and the University of Maryland Medical System. The DV/SAC was established in 1973 as the Sexual Assault Center to meet the growing demand for free specialized services to victims and secondary victims of rape and other sexual offenses in Prince George's County. Since its initial launch, the organization's name and programming has expanded from a primary focus on sexual assault to provide support services to adults and minors in Prince George's County who have experienced a wide variety of victimizations including sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, child sexual abuse imagery, and human trafficking.

Based on the statistics outlined above, there remains a significant need for a comprehensive service response to support these victim populations in Prince George's County especially, and the DV/SAC is the first and only comprehensive rape crisis center of its kind serving the residents of Prince George's County. In recognition of research-based best practices, our team of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, licensed counselors, victim advocates, and hotline staff provide survivors of violence with free, comprehensive, and trauma-informed support including forensic sexual assault and strangulation exams; crisis counseling; individual and group therapy; victim advocacy; and community education.

In the past year, we experienced an increased demand for the critical services the Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Center provides to victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking in Prince George's County.

In **2023**, our 100% grant-funded program:

- Provided comprehensive care to more than **225** domestic violence and sexual assault cases involving adults and minors.
- Performed over **180** forensic exams.
- Responded to over **1,500** hotline crisis calls.
- Delivered nearly **80** community education presentations to over **2,000** participants.

By contrast, in 2024, the DV/SAC's comprehensive program:

- Provided crisis and comprehensive care to a total of **729** domestic violence and sexual assault cases involving adults and minors.
- Identified and responded to **644** new sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking survivor clients.

- Performed approximately **250** forensic exams.
- Responded to over **2,000** hotline crisis calls.
- Delivered over **170** training and education presentations to over **4,800** participants.

The clear increase in comprehensive response to survivors last year was made possible primarily through an increase in our Victim of Crime Act grant award amount. As we continue our outreach efforts in the community, the DV/SAC anticipates a continued demand for these free victim advocacy services to ensure survivors receive the crisis and long-term support needed to access a restored state of physical, mental and social well-being – free of abuse and prolonged impacts of trauma.

This past year, our clients reported feeling safer, more stable, and more informed of their rights and resources available to them as a result as their involvement in DV/SAC programs. As one client shared in a message to their victim advocate, “This center helped me realize I am worth more than the abuse I experienced. I don’t know if I could have survived without you all.” Another client shared with the forensic nurse who supported them, “Thank you so much for all of your help. You turned a truly horrible experience into something manageable. I can’t thank you enough.”

Considering that our hospital-based program is 100% grant funded (over 40% currently funded by the Victim of Crime Act funds), we will not be able to maintain are organizational capacity to respond to these survivors in Prince George’s County without renewed support for the Victim Services Stabilization Act.

Sincerely,

Christine Cooley
 Manager Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Center
 University of Maryland Capital Region Medical Center

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A better state of care.

compassion | discovery | excellence | diversity | integrity



The Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy

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February 17, 2025

Funding Loss Impact Statement

The Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy is the sole provider of a comprehensive range of services—including legal representation, advocacy, case management, crisis sheltering, trauma therapy—to survivors of domestic and dating violence, stalking and sexual violence in St. Mary's County, Maryland. It is also the sole provider of legal and advocacy services in Calvert and Charles Counties. In addition, the Center provides community education and abuser intervention services to the region.

We are partially supported in providing these services by local, State and private funding, but approximately half of our funding is through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA is critical to our ability to offer the essential services that bring safety to the citizens we serve. And, providing these essential services is critical to making the communities in which we live far safer and more stable for all of us, in multiple ways (World Health Organization, CDC surveillance data and research).

- Over 27% of cases of workplace violence are rooted in domestic violence
- 50% of female homicide victims are killed by a current or former partner
- Annual cost of domestic violence to the U.S. economy: 5.8-12.6 billion
- Exposure to domestic violence in childhood costs the U.S. \$55 billion each year in health/mental health costs, violence and lost productivity

However, the essential services that VOCA funds are most clearly seen in the real-life examples (*names are changed) that are behind the statistics.

**Angelica (17) was a junior in high school when an acquaintance sexually assaulted her after offering to drive her home from a party. A friend called the Center for her and convinced her to talk to the crisis advocate, who listened to her story and informed her of her rights and of the services available to her. She was afraid to tell her parents but eventually decided to do so with the advocate present. The advocate met her and her parents at the hospital and accompanied her, at her request, during the forensic exam. She later was interviewed by a detective. She is now receiving specialized trauma therapy and has sought and received a protective order, with SMCFA attorney representation, against the offender. If not for the VOCA-funded crisis advocate, trauma therapy and*

attorney representation, Angelica would have had to face the situation alone and uninformed.

**Violet came to the Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy (SMCFA) seeking help securing a Protective Order, therapy for trauma, and an attorney to represent her in a divorce case after she obtained the protective order against her husband. During the 25-year marriage, the husband drank heavily and developed a drug addiction and abused his wife when he was drinking or using drugs. Our client raised the children and also worked full-time at a low-wage job with good benefits. The husband worked sporadically and earned a good income when he worked. After an incident of abuse where he broke her jaw and strangled her until she was unconscious, she realized that she was fortunate to survive and left him. He threatened to seek full custody if she didn't agree to give him all of her 401(k) and her substantial employee stock benefits, although the children wanted no relationship with him because of the years of abuse they had seen their mother suffer. A Center attorney represented her in the hearing for the Protective Order, which was granted along with Emergency Family Maintenance. An advocate provided excellent short-term advocacy and emotional support through the Protective Order period and she was referred for trauma-informed therapy, all of which is funded in part through VOCA; she was also represented in her divorce hearing by a VOCA-funded family law attorney, who successfully fought for her to keep her full benefits and full custody, along with child support. The client wrote in a survey conducted by the Center that "my attorney treated me like I was paying them a million dollars" and "every single person at SMCFA cared about me and I would never have made it through this without them."*

These examples are just two of the **2,838** individuals assisted through the Center for Family Advocacy last year. While each individual has a different situation and different needs, and not all cases need multiple services or attorney representation, many do, and *each* service delivered represents a citizen in crisis, and the resulting costs to the individual and to the larger community. *Eliminating funding does not eliminate the crisis or its costs.*

Eliminating the Victim Services Stabilization Act (VOCA Stabilization) means cutting funds that stabilize VOCA funding—and therefore stabilize our communities. VOCA funds are not just padding in our budgets; for many providers, the Center included, they are an essential backbone that requires local jurisdictions to contribute significant funding and crucial funds that allow us to provide these services—often life or death services—to Maryland citizens.

Sincere Regards,

Laura Joyce, M.A.
Executive Director
Southern Md. Center for Family Advocacy
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January 30, 2025

Annette Gilbert-Jackson Executive Director

The Center for Abused Persons (CAP) serves victims/survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence and others in crisis in Charles County. We offer crisis intervention and ongoing counseling & therapy along with hospital and court advocacy & accompaniment. We also provide 24-hour telephone Crisis Hotline services for anyone in need in Charles County. Staff provide community education and professional training throughout the county. We serve more than 400 survivors each year including both adults and children. Since the beginning of the Covid pandemic almost 5 years ago, requests for services have increased with staff maintaining full caseloads and community requests for information continuing to rise. We urge you to maintain level funding to ensure that innumerable victims are able to receive the services they so desperately need.

CAP's state and federal grant funding supports crisis intervention counseling to help survivors deal with the immediate aftermath of sexual and physical violence. In addition, our advocates provide court advocacy and accompaniment for medical and legal proceedings to support survivors as they navigate the many things with which they are faced following their victimization. Our therapists provide ongoing counseling and therapy on both a short- and long-term basis to help survivors of recent or past victimization manage its effects. As an example, one of our recent clients came to us reporting a repeated history of sexual violence. She was raped by her boyfriend while she was in high school. More recently, she was a victim of date rape that resulted in pregnancy. The perpetrator wanted her to have an abortion and when she refused, he cut off communication with her and put a restraining order on her. After initial crisis intervention services, the client is receiving ongoing counseling and therapy to address her past and recent sexual trauma. Without services like those provided by CAP staff, this client would have nowhere to turn for assistance in the aftermath of the repeated victimization she suffered at the hands of someone they cared for and trusted.

We were stunned to learn that once again the funds to serve some of our most vulnerable, marginalized citizens are at risk and victims/survivors will lose services to help them manage the trauma of the vicious victimization they experienced, often at the hands of someone who purported to love them. If Maryland cuts funding, this is what would happen to survivors in our community:

Victim Services

If the state does not maintain current levels of funding, we would have to eliminate staff positions causing victims to have to wait weeks or perhaps even months for appointments. A minimum of 50 victims will lose out on services.

Victims may not have access to 24/7 telephone crisis intervention services to have someplace to turn after a violent incident of sexual assault or domestic violence. Our Crisis Hotline is literally a lifeline for victims.

Impact on Students

Middle and high school students will not have access to presentations about healthy relationships. These seminars are vital not only to educate youth in the community, but often they also serve as a springboard for young people to disclose a history of sexual or physical abuse and allow them to finally get help after years of suffering in silence. At least 3,000 students will not have access to these programs.

Impact on Staff

The pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes in staffing. The majority of our current staff members have been with us less than three years, a significant change from pre-pandemic times. Staff have left for higher salaries, sign-on bonuses and positions that are 100% work from home. It is difficult, near impossible, for small, non-profit organizations to compete with large (for profit) corporations luring our staff away. Without steady and even additional funding we will continue to lose qualified staff who are lifelines for those in need in Charles County. The work we do, although rewarding, is quite challenging and it takes a special, dedicated professional to remain in this field. We, and survivors across our state, cannot afford to lose any more team members committed to working in this arena.

We appreciate that budget deficits are a reality, but the true reality people often want to forget is that there are thousands of victims/survivors of violence who need help to learn to manage the trauma of their victimization experience. It is vital that Maryland chooses to invest in the recovery of those impacted by these heinous crimes. Services for victims of all forms of sexual violence are essential to the health and well-being of our State. Please make certain those who are most vulnerable and have been victimized are able to continue to get the services they need to go on to live happy, successful and productive lives as residents of our State.



The Bridge

200 Chesapeake Blvd. Suite 2550 ♦ Elkton, Maryland 21922

Phone: 410.996.0333 ♦ Fax: 410.996.0820

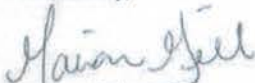
The Bridge is the comprehensive program serving victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking in Cecil County. Services offered through The Bridge include counseling, court advocacy, hospital accompaniment and safe shelter accommodations. The Bridge is a division of the Family Violence Programs in Cecil County, which falls under Cecil County Government. Additionally, The Child Advocacy Center is a division of the Family Violence Programs.

The Cecil County Child Advocacy Center provides a multidisciplinary approach to the investigation, prosecution and treatment of child sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, and child fatalities. The services provided through the center include therapy for trauma, medical evaluations, victim advocacy, support groups, investigation, and prosecution.

Recently, The Bridge has worked with a survivor of sexual assault who had been brutally assaulted by a person they met online. When the assault was reported, local law enforcement immediately contacted The Bridge for assistance in support of the survivor. As a result of our collaboration with community partners in law enforcement and trained staff at The Bridge. A sexual assault advocate was able to provide medical accompaniment at the hospital and support the survivor throughout the investigative process. Additionally, the advocate has been able to provide supportive resources and court accompaniment to the survivor. The survivor has reported feeling support and informed of the process as a result, hopefully leading to a successful prosecution of the offender and continued healing for the survivor.

The demand for services at each of these programs is increasing and we are submitting this letter to urge the continuation of funding for victim services. It is imperative that the State of Maryland provide the support and assistance that the survivors need and deserve.

Sincerely,



Marion Gill, LCSW-C

Cecil County, Coordinator of

Family Violence Programs

mgill@ccgov.org



The Bridge

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January 27, 2025

RE: Staffing Challenges

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to discuss the challenges that have been faced during and after the pandemic. The program experienced turnover as people evaluated the risks of being exposed to coronavirus. Many services that are provided to survivors of domestic and sexual violence are done in-person. Although, many practices were put into place to help mitigate risk, employees and clients still became infected with the virus. Positions remained vacant for long periods of time. Many jobseekers were looking for positions that allowed for working remotely.

One of the results of the pandemic was an increase in demand for mental health services as people struggled to navigate this new climate. Survivors of sexual and domestic violence who were already struggling with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder found themselves experiencing an increase in these symptoms. During the last 5 years, attracting qualified clinicians has been very challenging. The program can't compete with the salaries being offered by for profit counseling practices. One of the key positions at The Bridge is the Trauma Therapist position which remained vacant for almost two years. The advertised salary was increased twice during that time. To meet the need of survivors, it became necessary to find providers on a

contractual basis. The rate being required exceeded the set forth rate for consulting. Special permissions were requested. Waiting for approvals delayed the ability to provide these crucial services to survivors. The hourly rate required by the contracted therapists meant serving fewer survivors with the funding available. At the time of this writing, the position of Clinical Administrator remains vacant after 14 months. This position provides direct therapeutic services to sexual violence survivors, supervises clinical staff, organizes community workgroups, and facilitates a variety of meetings. In the absence of having the position filled, others have taken on added responsibilities. Existing staff are stretched as they try to accommodate with fewer resources. Two other positions remain vacant currently after months of advertisement. Programs need increased funding to provide competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified staff. Reduced funding will impede these efforts and ultimately it is survivors who pay the cost of not being able to obtain necessary services. These are services necessitated because of crimes committed by another person.

Sincerely,

Anne Bean, Chief of Human Services Division



Over the past year, the CARE Healing Center has experienced a significant increase in demand for the essential services we provide to survivors of sexual assault in Carroll County. These services—ranging from crisis intervention and counseling to medical accompaniments and helpline support—are critical lifelines for individuals navigating some of the most traumatic moments of their lives. To meet this growing demand, we have already expanded staffing and resources, but continued funding is essential to sustain this response and ensure that no survivor is left without the support they need.

From **July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024**, we served:

- **149 new clients**
- **200 helpline calls**
- **57 accompaniments** to medical exams, police interviews, or court hearings
- **98 crisis sessions**
- **570 counseling sessions**

These numbers already reflect a robust service demand. However, since the start of the current fiscal year, **July 1, 2024**, through January 2025—a period of just **six months**—we have experienced an even sharper rise:

- **103 new clients** (a pace that will surpass last year's total well before June 2025)
- **85 helpline calls**
- **59 accompaniments** (already exceeding last year's total in half the time)
- **128 crisis sessions** (a 30% increase compared to all of last year)
- **464 counseling sessions** (on track to far exceed last year's total of 570)

This dramatic surge has required us to **hire additional on-call medical accompaniment staff** to provide after-hours support for forensic exams—an essential service for survivors seeking immediate medical care and evidence collection. Our local hospital that conducts forensic exams reported the following numbers:

72 Patients were seen by the forensic nursing department this year

37 Adult/adolescent sexual assault

6 Child sexual assault

5 Child abuse



22 Physical assaults

14 Domestic violence

19 Strangulation

2 Infant/child deaths

Versus their Numbers in 2023:

Fifty-four patients seen by the forensic nursing department

35 adult/adolescent sexual assaults

2 Child sexual assaults

11 strangulations/domestic violence

5 child abuse/neglect

1 human trafficking

The Real Impact Behind the Numbers

Every number represents a survivor reaching out for help in the wake of profound trauma. Survivors rely on us to provide compassionate, trauma-informed support that enables them to regain a sense of safety, autonomy, and healing. Without our services, survivors would face overwhelming barriers to accessing the resources they need, potentially compounding the effects of their trauma.

For example:

- **Helpline calls** often represent the first courageous step survivors take in seeking help. Whether it's connecting them to immediate safety resources or helping them navigate their options, these calls save lives.
- **Crisis sessions** and **counseling** provide survivors with a safe space to process their experiences and begin their healing journey. These sessions are a cornerstone of long-term recovery.
- **Medical accompaniments** ensure that survivors are supported in the daunting process of undergoing forensic exams or engaging with law enforcement—critical steps in their pursuit of justice.



Meeting the Rising Need

The rise in demand for services is not a temporary fluctuation. It reflects broader societal awareness and increasing trust in our organization as a safe and reliable resource for survivors. However, meeting this demand has stretched our resources to the limit. Without continued grant funding, we risk losing the ability to maintain the staff, training, and infrastructure required to provide these lifesaving services.

Why Your Support Matters

Grant funding is critical to sustaining our operations and responding effectively to the growing number of survivors seeking help. Continued support will allow us to:

- Maintain the expanded staff needed for 24/7 crisis response.
- Increase capacity for counseling and crisis sessions to reduce wait times for survivors.
- Provide ongoing training for staff to ensure the highest quality of trauma-informed care.
- Cover operational costs associated with supporting a larger client base, such as transportation, materials, and outreach.

A Call to Action

Sexual assault is a pervasive issue that affects individuals, families, and entire communities. Cutting funding at a time when demand is rising would not only jeopardize the progress, we've made in supporting survivors but would also send a disheartening message to those who are bravely seeking help. Now, more than ever, we need your continued investment in this critical work. Together, we can ensure that every survivor who reaches out to us receives the care, advocacy, and support they deserve.

Here are some examples and testimonies of clients we have served this year:



MJ is a 62 year old female, who came to CARE as a secondary survivor to process the trauma associated with her son's sexual assault by their church priest that began when he was 8 years old. MJ's son who is now 40 years old, had only recently told his mother about his childhood sexual abuse, after years of hiding his pain through drug and alcohol abuse. MJ came to CARE after learning about our services through word of mouth in our community. She was experiencing intense anxiety, poor sleep, crying spells, feelings of guilt and self-blame, grief, and struggling to interact with her son without breaking down in front of him. Her symptoms were impacting her daily functioning, her family relationships, as well as her relationship with her faith.

MJ started individual trauma focused therapy with a CARE therapist. She learned to understand the impact of secondary traumatic experiences on her thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. She developed coping mechanisms to manage related symptoms, and gained a sense of safety and control by processing her trauma in a supportive environment. She was provided with valuable psychoeducation about normal trauma responses, identifying triggers, and practicing self-care techniques to promote her own healing. She learned how to talk with her son about his experiences and how to be a healthy support to him. CARE also provided resources to connect MJ and her family to legal services, and to connect her son with an attorney to pursue a case against the Archdiocese. As her therapy comes to a conclusion, MJ has consistently reported the significant impact working with her CARE therapist has made in her life. Her anxiety is under control, her relationship with her son is healthy and loving, and she rarely experiences feelings of guilt anymore. This client is a testament to the benefit of the services CARE offers in our community.

Over the last year, our office has been working diligently with a client who was sexually assaulted on McDaniel College's campus. Survivors of sexual assault on a small college campus often face unique challenges that can exacerbate the already difficult aftermath of such trauma. The close-knit nature of small communities can lead to heightened feelings of isolation and fear of judgment, as survivors often worry about encountering their perpetrator or facing social backlash. Similarly, a smaller size of the campus may result in a lack of anonymity, making it harder for survivors to come forward or seek support without fear of stigma or retaliation. The close relationships within a small campus community can also complicate reporting and investigation



processes, as survivors may fear repercussions from peers, faculty, or administrators. This is exactly what happened for our client. Thankfully, she became connected with our office when she went to the hospital for a sexual assault forensic exam. From the very beginning, our advocate was there for our client through each step, helping them understand their rights and options while empowering them to make informed decisions about how they would like to proceed. Our client decided she wanted to move forward reporting to the Title IX office at her school as well as move forward with reporting to law enforcement. With that, she also decided to get a protective order. Our advocate explained her rights and assisted the client with paperwork for her protective order. Because of her advocacy and support, our client was not only able to obtain the final protective order, but also have her perpetrator removed from the college campus to allow her to continue her education safely without fear of seeing him on a day-to-day basis.

The final protective order jumpstarted her ability to begin working with Title IX. As we all know, the Title IX process can be overwhelming and emotionally taxing, and having someone to provide guidance, support, and information can make a significant difference in the survivor's experience. Not only has our advocate ensured our client was supported from the very start, but she has served as a liaison between the survivor and the college. Becoming this liaison has allowed for our clients needs and concerns to have been effectively communicated and addressed in a timely manor these last several months. This support has helped mitigate feelings of isolation and helplessness that survivors often experience, fostering a sense of validation and empowerment. Working with Title IX at McDaniel has certainly been an uphill battle with our advocate having to fight for the rights of our client and ensure that they have a safe space to continue their education. While our client has faced a lot of backlash from her peers within her program, our agency has provided her comfort, empathy, compassion, and support in our office during her time of need.

Our client then decided to move forward with reporting to law enforcement. Our advocate ensured that she would be with our client at every step of this process for her from the initial interview and meeting with law enforcement, to follow-ups and meetings with the State's Attorney's Office. Navigating the criminal legal system can be extremely



difficult, but our agency has made sure that she would not go through it alone.

In 2023 through 2024 there was a case of childhood sexual abuse which was initially brought to the attention of CARE by Carroll Hospital, which contacted our Helpline to request a hospital accompaniment for a forensic exam. The victim, was an autistic 16-year old who was being raped by her step-father. Her mother walked in on the assault and immediately sought out police and medical attention for her daughter. From the outset, CARE provided comprehensive support to this family, offering education about sexual violence and connecting them with critical resources and services.

CARE's involvement with this family has been extensive, reflecting the significant efforts required to support families affected by sexual violence. Our team facilitated the family's access to crisis intervention services and provided accompaniment during multiple court hearings. Through our counseling services, the daughter and mother gained the empowerment and support necessary to confront the abuser in court. This journey culminated in the abuser receiving a jail sentence, marking a pivotal step in the family's path to justice and healing.

The legal system can have a profound impact on victims of sexual violence, both positively and negatively. For many, navigating the legal process can be an overwhelming and retraumatizing experience. Victims often face challenges such as reliving the trauma during testimony, enduring invasive questioning, and encountering delays or setbacks in the pursuit of justice. Despite these challenges, the legal system also provides an avenue for accountability and closure. Securing a conviction or a favorable civil judgment can serve as a powerful affirmation of the victim's experience and a critical step toward healing. However, these outcomes are only possible with sustained advocacy and support to help victims endure the complexities of the legal process.

Beyond the criminal proceedings, CARE's advocates were deeply involved in the civil case filed against the abuser. Our team attended every court hearing related to this case, supporting the family as they navigated a complex legal process. The civil case concluded



with a significant victory for the victim, who was granted full rights to her family home and awarded monetary compensation for the pain and suffering inflicted by the abuser.

Throughout this case, CARE's staff demonstrated unwavering dedication, investing substantial time and effort to ensure the family received consistent and comprehensive support. From crisis intervention to legal advocacy and counseling, our team worked tirelessly to meet the needs of this family during their most challenging times.

The mother and daughter have expressed profound gratitude for CARE's ongoing support, recognizing the critical role our organization played in helping them achieve justice and begin their healing journey. As they continue to move forward, CARE remains committed to providing them with the assistance and resources they need to rebuild their lives.

In May of 2024, this family that we have worked with from start to finish from hospital accompaniment to sentencing hearing at court was granted a permanent protective order. This couldn't have been possible without the advocacy, time, care, and effort of CARE staff who worked with this client and her family for the past 2 years. Because of this support, this client confidently went on the record and demanded she be granted a permanent protective order to protect herself and her children and the judge couldn't have agreed more. This is one of only 4 ever granted within Carroll County. The family continues their healing journey through use of our counseling services but knows that they will be safe with CARE standing right beside them.

Client began seeing Navigator for risks associated with human trafficking when minor was 12yo and pictures and solicitations from unknown older adults were found on clients phone on apps. Minor and family were given education on grooming, trafficking and online safety. Minor has continued services with Navigator and has continuously opted to remain in services, indicating that they are beneficial. Navigator has been able to provide legal advocacy to client throughout the active investigation and remained a source of support throughout this time. Resources such as psychotherapy and clinical tools to handle stressful situations have been provided, aiding client in ways to manage hardships. Client was also given education on healthy relationships, trafficking, and online safety. When young people are educated about the risks and how to protect



themselves—such as being cautious about who they trust online, recognizing grooming behaviors, and knowing where to seek help—they are better equipped to avoid becoming victims. It can be difficult for youth to connect to service providers and feel safe and comfortable sharing personal aspects of their life. When this is able to occur, it is a strong sentiment to the outstanding work that agencies are doing. When youth are put at-risk for trafficking, it is fundamental that they have services that can assist them on their journey of healing and recovery.

“The professionals at CARE are incredibly compassionate and always accessible, making it easy to get the support necessary for my wellness at times that work for me. They’ve connected me to invaluable resources based on whatever my needs may be, ensuring I have a stable foundation for my future. CARE healing center has been an integral part of my healing and acceptance of my experience with human trafficking. I have been receiving services at CARE healing center for over a year now after many years not seeking outside help to process my trauma. I truly feel the time I have been receiving services through this organization has been transformative for me. Leaving organizations like CARE Healing Center underfunded puts victims at greater risk and makes it harder to access the help so desperately needed and deserved.”

“I never could have gone through all of this without your support. You walked into the ER, empowered me immediately, and supported me through that horrible experience. I am so grateful for you and your organization. I never thought I would need you, but I did, and thank you for being here.” The client received in-person hospital accompaniment support, crisis intervention services, legal accompaniment support, and accessed our 24/7 helpline.”



January 27, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sexual Assault/Spouse Abuse Resource Center (SARC) is clear in its mission: "We are a lifeline for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking by providing safe haven, advocacy, resources, and hope in Harford County." Since it was founded in 1978, SARC has been providing life saving support to our community.

Proposed budget cuts to victim services would negatively impact SARC's ability to provide this critical services such as a 24-hour helpline, sexual assault companion support at hospitals, crisis counseling, legal advocacy, and 40 bed shelter support.

SARC continues to face challenges with hiring and retaining qualified staff. Grant funding has not kept up with inflation and the mandatory increase in minimum wage. We have had to increase pay for our entry level jobs to stay competitive with hiring rates at local fast food restaurants and retail establishments. This creates compression for jobs requiring higher education such as licensed therapists and attorneys. SARC has reviewed local salary survey information and we are unable to stay within the range to compete with even the lowest pay for these positions. These jobs are stressful and even the most passionate advocates must provide for their family's needs as inflation impacts ALL households. Constant turnover of critical positions impacts client services as it may take up to six months to recruit for a vacancy which stretches staff too thin. Remaining staff often burn out and leave as a result. It is a vicious cycle that could be solved with increased funding that is sustained and predictable. It is heartbreaking that our staff have to endure the additional stress of not knowing if the agency will have enough money to meet even the basic needs of our team members.

It is critical that we have the employees to respond to situations like these:

- This month, a 16-year-old survivor of sexual assault is successfully completing counseling through SARC. Initially at risk of entering foster care, she has made incredible strides during her time with us. Together, we addressed the trauma, developed healthy coping skills, and fostered post-traumatic growth. She described feeling like for the first time she was thriving—her grades have improved, she is living in a stable and safe home environment, and she has gained the tools to self-regulate her emotions. She will graduate from intensive trauma therapy and transition to a mental health maintenance therapist to continue building on her progress.
- A SARC employee responded to the hospital to provide support for a 28 year old woman requesting a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam. She was sexually assaulted by her husband whom she had recently separated from due to domestic violence. The abuser had broken back into their home and violently assaulted her. SARC was able to respond to provide support while she received her exam. The client then came to the SARC shelter with her two young children as it was not safe to return back to her home. The client was able to receive the emotional support she needed with SARC's Safehouse staff available 24 hours a day.

Threatened budget cuts will be detrimental in retaining qualified staff to do this life saving work.



Luisa Caiazzo



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To: Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

From: Rhonda Pick, Executive Director

Testimony Regarding Potential State of Maryland Budget Cuts

2025

Family Crisis Resource Center, Inc. (FCRC) is a private, not for profit agency that provides shelter, 24-hour hotline, counseling, legal services, case management, SART response, and advocacy and accompaniment free of charge to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault/abuse in Allegany County. Allegany County is in rural Western Maryland. The county covers an area of 428 square miles and has a population of approximately 72,000. Areas of the county are isolated as a great deal of the population live in small towns and scattered homes through a relatively large geographic area. Allegany County's services and resources are often limited or non-existent compared to more urban and suburban areas. With limited transportation services, cell phone service, and affordable internet access throughout the county, accessing services is often difficult for victims. For this reason, FCRC uses outreach services such as SART advocacy and domestic violence officer/advocate follow ups to ensure that our program reaches as many victims as possible. During State Fiscal Year 2024, our agency provided services to 500 unduplicated clients, fielded 2,500 hotline calls, 800 case management/counseling contacts, 182 officer/advocate domestic violence follow-up contacts, and legal assistance with protective orders for 40 survivors, facilitated empowerment groups in the middle and high schools for 403 students, provided 200 parent/child supervised visits/exchanges to 30 families, and community presentations to 411 attendees. FCRC's SART/Domestic Violence hospital advocates are on-call 24/7 and provide services to not only victims in Allegany County, but also Garrett County. During Fiscal Year 2024, the SART advocates provided accompaniment to Forensic Exams for 21 victims and counselors met with 73 victims for sexual violence matters. All victim service numbers are on target to exceed last year's numbers. As you can see from the numbers above, Allegany County residents lean heavily on FCRC for help, hope, and healing from very traumatic events that they and their children have endured. Without FCRC's services, victims would have to travel an hour north to Pennsylvania, an hour south to West Virginia, an hour east to Washington County, or an hour west to Garrett County to access services. Many residents of Allegany County do not own or have access to reliable automobiles and would have to rely on friends and family for transportation. If FCRC services were not available, victims may attend a few appointments at a neighboring agency but traveling that distance every week would be cumbersome resulting in abandonment of services for victims and their children.

The crimes that have been occurring in Allegany County over the last several years have become more violent and frequent, requiring a higher-level skill set for our employees. Many positions

require educational and licensure requirements, but limited funding is provided for these positions. Employees know coming to work for a non-profit agency that they will not acquire wealth working in this type of setting; however, we are not able to compensate them at a rate that allows them to pay for their schooling and licensure..... schooling and licensure that is required for these positions. We had an employee who had been with the agency for eight years leave. She accepted a position with our local medical facility. Losing this employee was a huge loss to the agency. She worked in several departments and was knowledgeable in many areas of the agency. We also lost one of our counselors to the same medical facility and it took 4 months to fill the position, creating a wait list for victim counseling. FCRC has never had to have a wait list. We have had several openings in our shelter as well. The most recent placement took approximately 2 months to fill. With some of the wages that we are able to offer our new employees, they can go to any fast-food restaurant in our county and earn the same, if not more. More funding is needed to guarantee that victims throughout our state have not just free services, but good quality services. It is vital that the State of Maryland provides more support for survivors.

If victims do not have a safe space readily available to turn to for support and healing, holding offenders accountable will be an insurmountable task. Prosecutors will have victims who are not emotionally available or capable of providing crucial information for their cases or testimony at trial, resulting in offenders not being punished for their crimes and back in the community.

FCRC has an amazing relationship with all law enforcement agencies throughout Allegany County, often working in tandem to keep victims and their children safe and hold offenders accountable for their actions. When local law enforcement was recently asked "where do you refer victims?" the unanimous answer was FCRC and when pressed further stated "if we didn't have them in our community, I don't know what we would do. They are such a big part of our response to victims with officer/advocate follow-ups, SART/DVRT calls to the hospital, and just general information.... we would be lost without them." This relationship allows victims immediate access to FCRC's services when needed any time of the day or night. A decrease in core services would create an enormous gap in referrals for law enforcement and victims and their children will not have immediate access to services, creating a safety risk for those who are most vulnerable in our community.

Below are a few lived experiences of survivors that were assisted by Family Crisis Resource Center, Inc.

Female lived in the same neighborhood as her estranged husband. One evening, as she takes a walk around the neighborhood, he kidnaps her and holds her in his home for 3 days. He beats her, rapes her, and does things to her that nightmares are made of. He allows her to leave on the third day and she goes to a friend's house and calls the police. She was connected with FCRC at the hospital and continued services for over a year. Because of the continued support that she received, she was able to testify at the trial. Her testimony laid the foundation for a guilty verdict and a decades long prison sentence.

Female had a gun held to her head in front of her two teenaged children. She was made to repeat the statements that he wanted her to say in front of their children. These statements included that she was a whore, a piece of shit, and that she was sleeping with everyone in town. She tells a coworker about what is going on in her home and they call law enforcement. She obtains a protective order and is represented by an attorney provided by FCRC. The order keeps her husband away from the home, her work, the kids' schools, and daycare. Several weeks after the hearing for

the final order, her husband breaks into the garage where her car is kept and their children's bikes, gets into her car and commits suicide by shooting himself in the head. The oldest son found him when he went to retrieve his bike. She and the children came to FCRC for counseling, advocacy and accompaniment, and assistance with Criminal Injuries Compensation.

Female was assaulted by her estranged husband in her bathroom. He was pounding her head and face off the porcelain sink and tried to drown her in a tub of water. Law enforcement was called by the neighbors who heard her screaming. Her screams could be heard on the 911 call that was played in court. He was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months in jail. The victim continued counseling with FCRC for several years and the advocate was able to assist her with criminal injuries compensation.

On behalf of Family Crisis Resource Center, Inc., and the victims/survivors of Allegany County, I implore you to reconsider the funding reduction for victim services. The victims of our county deserve a center for hope and healing to assist them on their path to become survivors and to live a violence free life.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Pick

Rhonda Pick
Executive Director
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Funding - testimony - house - BRFA - HB 352 - VOCA

Uploaded by: Laura Jessick

Position: FWA



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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**Testimony Regarding HB352
Opposing Proposed Permanent Reductions to
Victim Services Stabilization Act Funding
&
Opposing Proposed Depletion of
Rape Kit Testing Fund
Rape Crisis & Sexual Assault Funding**

Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel
February 27, 2025

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is Maryland's state sexual assault coalition. Its mission is to prevent sexual assault, advocate for accessible, compassionate care for survivors of sexual violence, and work to hold offenders accountable. MCASA also certifies the State's rape crisis centers to ensure survivors are provided with high quality and trauma-informed care. The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention & Policy (GOCPP) is required by state law to "regularly consult, collaborate with, and consider the recommendations" of MCASA regarding "sexual assault crisis programs and policies, practices, and procedures that impact victims of sexual assault." Crim.Pro. §11-923(e).

Rape Crisis Centers & Your Communities

In the field of responding to sexual assault survivors, there are 17 rape crisis centers across the state. Most serve one jurisdiction, with 3 serving multiple counties. They have specialized staff and also are charged with sitting on local Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs). No county has more than one certified rape crisis, and the certified rape crisis centers also provide support to other organizations in their community that respond to survivors. MCASA also houses the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), which provides legal services to sexual assault survivors throughout the state. Together these programs create a safety net of expert resources for survivors. There are similar networks of comprehensive specialized programs serving other populations. These include comprehensive programs for domestic violence survivors, child advocacy centers, and legal services programs.

These are examples of what rape crisis programs do in your communities:

- Counseling for sexually abused children and adults
- Hospital accompaniment during sexual assault forensic exams (rape kits)
- Advocacy for students who are sexually assaulted at college or in K-12 schools
- Helping survivors seek protective orders
- Coordinating with child advocacy centers providing child-centered responses to victims of child sexual abuse
- Long term legal services, such as divorce and child custody
- Emergency shelters and programs
- Supporting victims of sex trafficking, including coordinating with regional navigator programs for youth and child victims
- Serving on Sexual Assault Response Teams working with law enforcement and prosecutors to improve criminal justice responses

Rape Crisis Centers provide services to thousands of victims annually throughout the State of Maryland, and the need for services has been increasing dramatically while financial pressures are exploding.

Maryland's sexual assault services providers are facing the following challenges in the coming fiscal year:

- Increased demand
- Continued workforce pressure
- Inflation and increased costs
- Federal uncertainty

Expected Reduction in Federal Resources – ARPA Cliff

Rape crisis centers and culturally specific programs helping sexual assault survivors received federal ARPA/Covid funds. These are ending, reducing resources by \$1.55million this fiscal year, and ending over \$10 million dollars in support for sexual assault and domestic violence programs provided in the wake of the pandemic.

New Challenges at the Federal level

Changes at the federal level create significant uncertainty and potentially threaten core funding for services for survivors of sexual violence. As of the writing of this testimony:

- the federal Office of Violence Against Women has taken down all grant applications (including those the State of Maryland would apply for) and the future of STOP funds, Sexual Assault Services Program funds, and other programs is uncertain;
- funds for survivors of domestic violence through the federal Family Violence Prevention & Services Act are also uncertain, with the HHS website stating that information about the program is “no longer current”.

Together this is **roughly \$6.5million dollars in federal funding that is currently designated for anti-sexual assault and domestic violence services that may disappear, be cut, or be delayed.** On top of this, federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funds are also in flux. State and federal

VOCA funds actually provide the majority of funding for sexual assault and domestic violence programs.

BRFA Shatters the Purpose of Maryland's Victim Services Stabilization Act (VOCA)

The Victim Services Stabilization Act, championed by lead sponsors Chair Ben Barnes and Chair Guy Guzzone, was enacted in response to fluctuations in federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA). With this innovative law, Maryland committed to ensuring that victims of crime have access to the services that help them recover, enforce their rights, and support community safety.

Federal VOCA has been historically unstable, so the heart of the Victim Services Stabilization Act is to stop the up and down of funding in the field. The hope was, and continues to be, that future federal contributions will eventually be the majority or even all of the fund. Recent events in Washington may make this less likely or may not – another federal bill has bipartisan support and is continuing efforts to expand federal funding. bipartisan ([H.R.8061/S.4514](#), the Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act of 2024). In any event, *the new changes in Washington make the state Victim Services Stabilization Act even more vital*. The BRFA proposal to amend the law will have the effect of making a \$10 million dollar cut to victim services in FY26 and, in the future, the reduction could be even lower since the BRFA proposes requiring a flat \$35million instead of backfilling to \$60 million.

Core Services

Both federal and state VOCA statutes are designed to help support continuing core services for crime victims. VOCA is not designed as seed money or to support one-off projects such as those contemplated by other grant programs (the Byrne grant program, as an example, supports isolated projects not ongoing staff). *A \$10 million cut will harm crime victims by depriving them of important services*. This is not just victims of sexual assault, but a wide range of victims of crime. The combined federal and state VOCA funds helps over 120 organizations ranging from rape crisis centers, to child advocacy centers, to victim witness assistants in prosecutors' offices. Because these funds are primarily for services, these cuts will also cut jobs. Ten million dollars easily translates into 100 jobs or more.

The proposed BRFA cuts will harm survivors of rape, child sexual abuse, and other forms of sexual violence. Stories from across the state are attached and describe the challenges that reduction in VOCA will cause.

Depleting the Rape Kit Testing Fund

The proposed BRFA also reduces the Rape Kit Testing Fund by \$5,782,677 (moving \$4million out of the Fund, plus taking another \$1,782,677 in FY25 funds). Maryland continues to have a significant backlog of untested rape kits and survivors waiting for justice. MCASA strongly opposes depleting the Rape Kit Testing Fund (a special fund) while there continues to be a rape kit backlog.

Consider this survivor's story illustrating the importance of testing the backlog:

“Emily” was violently raped by a stranger more than a decade ago. She sought medical treatment, evidence was collected, and she reported the crime to police. Nothing more happened in her case. She went for years living in fear. She reached out when efforts to test the backlog were publicized and still heard nothing. Finally, her kit was tested.

Her rapist was in jail. He is a serial offender and pled guilty to other rapes years ago. While Emily was living in fear, her rapist was incarcerated and no one bothered to test her kit and let her know. She feels safer now.

Maryland allocated funding to test the backlog and should not stop until it finishes the job. The current budget proposes continuing funding for rape kit testing – but that includes testing for current cases. Don’t deplete the Rape Kit Testing Fund until the backlog is eliminated.

Continue Support for the Most Vulnerable Marylanders

MCASA respectfully advocates that now is not the time to reduce state support for rape victims, survivors of child sexual abuse, survivors of intimate partner violence, and for other victims of crime. We appreciate the fiscal issues facing the state, but ask the General Assembly and the State to recognize the crisis facing programs and keep funding steady and programs stable as we learn the full impact of federal changes.

If funding is reduced, ultimately it is survivors who pay the cost of not being able to obtain necessary services. These are services necessitated because of crimes committed by another person.

Now is not the time to reduce state support for victim services.

Maryland can make better choices.

Support Survivors. Support Services.



HB 352- MNADV - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Laure Ruth

Position: FWA



BILL NO: House Bill 352
TITLE: Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2025
COMMITTEE: Appropriations and Ways and Means
HEARING DATE: February 27, 2025
POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the federally recognized state domestic violence coalition that brings together the 24 comprehensive victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the COMMITTEE to report favorably with amendments on HB 352.**

The Network deeply appreciates the difficult circumstances the Governor and his administration face this year in creating a budget that meets the State's laws and needs. We also appreciate GOCPP's commitment to funding organizations that assist victims of crime, and particularly those that serve domestic violence victims and survivors. We believe that helping citizens live their lives safe from violence at the hands of intimate partners is a priority for Governor Moore as well as for the Legislature. Nonetheless, the 2026 Budget intends to cut \$10 million dollars from the VOCA Stabilization funding enacted by the legislature just a few years ago. (See HB 352, page 19, lines 29-30, Page 20, lines 1-2).

We hear every day from our member programs about the challenges they face in responding to increased demand for services that went up dramatically during COVID and never went down. The new norm of virtual work environments, that can't be replicated in a direct service organization, along with increased costs of living have put a tremendous strain on all of our programs' workforce. Of course, the current insecurity of federal funding streams adds an unbearable amount of pressure on our service providers even while they continue to offer the highest level of service to survivors. Now is not the time to cut funding for victims and survivors of domestic violence or other crimes, such as sexual assault.



Last year, our comprehensive Domestic Violence Programs answered over 41,000 hotline calls and provided over 100,000 bed nights to families fleeing violence.¹ A 20% cut to State VOCA funds (VOCG) means that 20,000 shelter beds will go empty and 10,000 calls for help will not be answered. This does not account for legal services that will be cut, leaving victims without representation in protection order and other related cases (most often custody).

In addition to VOCG, this budget also eliminates \$1million dollars of General Domestic Violence Comprehensive funds, which means comprehensive domestic violence providers will lose 1/3 of the State funds that are earmarked specifically for domestic violence services on top of the VOCG cuts. Many other states provide much more in their state budgets to support domestic violence service providers and their respective state coalition.

Our programs, and other service providers who serve domestic violence victims need the proposed funding cut restored. We also need GOCPP to be as flexible as possible with how they administer the funds that are available. Strategies such as no cost extensions, removal of caps on some administrative costs and more simplified processes will help this dire situation. GOCPP has moved in this direction, which is positive, and we urge them to keep going. We also question the administration's desire to fund "new" programs, which is going to necessarily come at the expense of experienced service providers who will be forced to lay off staff and reduce services.

Each year, MNADV coordinates with the National Network End Domestic Violence a "One Day Count." This is reported and compiled with all the other states.²

On September 6, 2023, 23 out of 23 (100%) identified domestic violence programs in Maryland participated in a national count of domestic violence services conducted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV). The following figures represent the information shared by

¹ These numbers are aggregate numbers based on applications to MNADV from the comprehensive programs in the state who were required to provide data in their January, 2025 Certification Applications. There are undoubtedly other non-comprehensive programs who receive VOCA funding and would be unable to serve as many victims as they do now, e.g., The Women's Law Center of Maryland, CHANA, Maryland Legal Aid, Roberta's House, UMB, various hospital-based programs.

² The NNEDV website is not active at this time due to issues with federal funding. www.nnedv.org. Thus, we cannot provide the final edition submitted to NNEDV. However, these numbers accurately reflect the report made to the NNEDV for 2023.



the participating Maryland programs about the services they provided during the 24- hour survey period.

1135 Victims Served

555 adult and child victims of domestic violence found refuge in emergency shelters, transitional housing, hotels, motels, or other housing provided by local domestic violence programs.

580 adult and child victims received non-residential supportive services, which commonly include transportation, housing advocacy, legal support, counseling, and more.

227 Hotline Contacts Received

Domestic violence hotlines are lifelines for victims in danger, providing support, information, safety planning, and resources via phone, chat, text, email, and more. Hotline staff received 227 contacts, averaging nearly/more than 9.5 contacts per hour.

67 People Educated

Programs provided 5 educational sessions and trainings to 67 members of the public, addressing topics like domestic violence prevention and early intervention.

299 Unmet Requests for Services

Victims made 299 requests for services that programs could not provide because they lacked sufficient resources. Approximately 36% of these unmet requests were for emergency shelter, hotels, motels, and transitional or other housing.

Continuity of funding levels and support for time-tested, effective service providers will ensure that Maryland's safety net will stay intact. It will save lives.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on HB 352 with amendments to add funds back to the VOCA stabilization funding and the GDVC funding.**

Testimony HB 352 FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Kurt Wolfgang

Position: UNF



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Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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February 24, 2025

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TESTIMONY REGARDING HB 352

Regarding: Budget Reconciliation and the Victim Services Stabilization Act

Dear Mr. Chair and Distinguished Members:

I hope you are already familiar with the miraculous national treasure that is the Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center (MCVRC). Vince and Roberta Roper founded this organization in 1982 after the death of their beloved daughter Stephanie. Helping them found the organization and shepherding it through these many years is one of the proudest accomplishments of my life.

We lead the way in services to crime victims and in forming the future of victims' rights in Maryland, the United States, and across the world. The federal statute granting rights to crime victims is named after Stephanie Roper and several other victims because of the immense effort of Vince, Roberta, and this organization which leads the way in fighting for victims' rights on the federal level. Two different U.S. presidents honored Vince and Roberta for their work. I have received several accolades from two U.S. Attorneys General and awards from two Governors of Maryland for my work on behalf of the organization. You will recall that the House honored Roberta last session.

Our unique core function is providing direct legal services to crime victims. We provide victims with attorneys who enter their appearance in the criminal case against their victimizer. When victims' rights are violated, we file motions to enforce their rights and are able to appeal court decisions for them. When their victimizer comes up for parole, we are still there with them. Over the years, we have represented more than 1,000 survivors of murders, as well as victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, violent offenses, and thefts. Recently, we represented multiple victims of clergy abuse and played a pivotal role in convincing the Court to release the Attorney General's Report on Clergy Abuse in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. We open more than 1,000 new cases each year, often representing multiple victims and survivors in each case.

Each year, we wish and pray that those in authority recognize and appreciate the critical need for the excellent work we provide to Maryland's victims. Yet each year, we battle for our very existence in terms of funding.

Funds are in short supply in 2025 in Maryland. While we understand the need for budget cuts, we believe that cutting funds for crime victims is not the solution. I challenge you, your committee members, all Maryland legislators, and the Governor and his staff to find a better way than to cut funding for critical services to crime victims. The current budget proposal seeks to slash funds from the Victims' Services Stabilization Act, which will have devastating effects on victims and other services our nationally recognized organization has been providing for 43 years.

Despite our survival and thriving for 43 years, our organization is financially fragile. MCVRC doesn't know from year to year whether adequate funding will come or not. In recent years, we have been blessed with outstanding attorneys, advocates, and support staff. One of the great vulnerabilities of our organization is retaining that staff, which will become far more challenging once layoffs are required due to budget instability. Job security has not been an issue within our organization. But once layoffs become necessary, we may well face a domino effect of losing outstanding staff to more secure positions elsewhere.

We are now the only organization in Maryland providing free mental health services to all victims of violent crime in Maryland in any significant numbers. Surely, the services we provide make your list of "must-have" items, as opposed to those of lesser importance on the "nice-to-have" list. This method of prioritizing is the method that every household must go through in making their budget. I ask you, the members of the legislature, to prioritize your budget the same way. If cuts need to be made, there are plenty of nice-to-have programs that can wait until there are more funds available. By anyone's judgment, the services we provide are must-have services.

Perhaps I can tell a story that might convince those who have doubts as to the vital nature of what we do. Decades ago, a Maryland State Senator whose support we had sought on many occasions, called our organization asking for assistance. His niece had been murdered. Despite our many years of fighting in the legislature for many bills, including bills ensuring the ability of the victims and survivors to stay in the courtroom at all times, one of the Senator's first questions to us was why his family had to remain in the hallway and was not allowed in the courtroom for the trial.

MCVRC represented his family. The Senator finally understood the importance of our services. He became one of our staunchest supporters during his tenure in the Senate.

When I first heard the words of Governor Moore's motto "leave no one behind" my optimism peaked. Mr. Chair, I urge you and the members of your committee to take the necessary steps to protect and preserve our vital services to crime victims. Together, we can ensure that no victim is left behind without the support they need. The victims of Maryland have often been left behind, and MCVRC has been left behind as well in getting the recognition it deserves for easing the suffering of those Maryland victims who are too often forgotten. I pray that there is never another member of the legislature who has to experience what the Senator above had to experience. But if it happens, we will be there. We will be there for your parent, your child, or your spouse when evil strikes. Will you help us be there for others? Will you help us continue mental health services for people facing the worst trauma in their lives?

We ask that you reject the changes proposed to the Victim Services Stabilization Act and retain the original dollar figure state of \$60 million dollars. That figure reflects an annual total of Federal and State funding.

Thank you for your kind consideration from the thousands of victims who have been touched in so many ways by Vince and Roberta's inspiring life work at Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center.

Sincerely,

Kurt W. Wolfgang,
Executive Director
On Behalf of All Maryland Victims and Survivors