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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 186**  
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**DOROTHY J. LENNIG, LEGAL CLINIC DIRECTOR**

The House of Ruth Maryland is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City and Baltimore, Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. House Bill 186 would stabilize VOCA funding by backfilling the gap and ensuring an annual \$60 million allocation with state funds. **We urge the House Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 186.**

The purpose of HB 186 is to provide stable funding and support for victims' services programs by supplementing federal funding when federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds fluctuate. This will allow victims' services programs to provide trauma-informed, high-quality services without concern for gaps in funding.

Using VOCA funding, House of Ruth Maryland operates a 24-hour crisis counseling hotline; emergency shelter/hoteling; service coordination and support to meet basic needs such as food security, transportation assistance, workforce development, childcare, income, housing and healthcare; group and individual clinical services for adults and children and peer support; legal advocacy and representation; and, connection to such services as Criminal Injuries Compensation, the Address Confidentiality Program, and Vine Protective Order.

The lack of consistent and stable funding has a detrimental impact on victims' services providers. Entering each new year with the fear of budget cuts, delays in funding, and inconsistent priorities makes it impossible for programs to plan for future services. This results in programs not filling vacant positions, not partnering with other organizations, and not expanding needed services, all because of fear of lack of funding. These are just a few examples of the impact of the fluctuation in VOCA funding.

HB 186 would mandate an annual \$60 million in VOCA funding by requiring the State to back fill any gap in federal funding using State funds. This would provide stable funding and support for victims' services programs and allow these programs to continue to provide critical services to victims in need.

**The House of Ruth urges a favorable report on House Bill 186.**