

A LIFEBRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

CENTER FOR HOPE

Advancing hope, healing and resilience



HB186 Victim Services Programs – Supplementing Federal Funding and Support (Victim Services Stabilization Act)

House Appropriations Committee – January 31, 2023

Testimony of Adam Rosenberg, Executive Director, LifeBridge Health Center for Hope

Position: **SUPPORT**

Center for Hope writes in support of HB186, which would stabilize funding for Maryland victims of crime by ensuring there will be a minimum of \$60 million annually available to augment the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) fund. At least 118 agencies across Maryland receive this critical source of funding to help children (75% of funds), the elderly (11%), the LGBTQ community (10%), domestic violence (45%), sexual assault (51%), and human trafficking (27%). Every county in Maryland receives VOCA funding, which in turn provides a safety net and support system for all nonprofits, police departments, departments of social services, health care institutions, and prosecutor offices across the state.

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, provides trauma-informed crisis intervention, forensic interviews, medical exams, mental health, wraparound case management, family advocacy and workforce development services to patients and community members who have experienced child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, community/gun violence. We help over 6,000 violence victims and their families in the Baltimore region each year.

VOCA funding supports a significant portion of our work, including forensic interviewers, mental health trauma therapists, bilingual practitioners, and nurse practitioners in our nationally recognized child advocacy center; advocates and therapists in DOVE, one of the state's oldest and largest hospital-based domestic violence programs; and our hospital-based community and gun violence response team.

Since Maryland's VOCA money originates from a fluctuating federal source (the federal Crime Victims Fund), state funding levels have been unpredictable and erratic. For example, as of January 2022, the federal Crime Victims Fund was at an 11 year low, and Center for Hope was among the Maryland agencies scrambling to handle an anticipated 60% reduction in VOCA funding. To prepare, we instituted a hiring freeze that left two critical child mental health and abuse support group positions unfilled during the pandemic – even though caseloads and needs more than doubled. We turned away children and families, while dramatically increasing the workloads of an already stressed staff. We continue to feel the effects, as secondary traumatic stress and burnout led to several staff resignations.

Further making these funds critical at this time, is that federal efforts to “fix” the federal crime victims fund will not be felt in the states for several years. That is a full lifetime in the healing process of vulnerable victims. We thank Appropriation leadership for this important bill and urge a favorable report on HB186 to help agencies like ours maintain consistent, healthy care for thousands of Maryland's survivors, caregivers, and care community.

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