



## **VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) FAQ & Talking Points**

### **What is VOCA?**

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund was created by Congress in 1984 to provide federal support to state and local programs that assist victims of crime. VOCA uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) for programs that serve victims of crime, including domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, legal support, faith-based organizations, and child abuse organizations. Nationally, these funds support services for over 6 million victims of all types of crimes annually through 6,462 direct service organizations, including Resilience.

### **Why is VOCA being cut?**

Since 2019, the VOCA funds released annually have declined because of shrinking deposits and subsequent declines in the CVF balance. The declines are due to prosecutorial strategies that have changed over the last decade and are not a partisan issue. When deposits into the CVF are reduced, the amount allocated to states for victim services is reduced. Illinois had in large part avoided the impact of this up until now. Beginning July 1, 2023, the funding available to Illinois Rape Crisis Centers through VOCA will be cut by 49%.

### **Can we fix VOCA?**

We can! And did. On July 21, 2021, President Biden signed the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021 (VOCA Fix Act) into law (Public law 117-27). The law, which will secure billions in victim services, will take time to replenish the fund to 2018 levels.

### **What efforts have been made to offset these cuts?**

We are continuing to look at strategies at the federal level and the state level to offset the loss of crucial dollars across the country. President Biden released the FY24 federal budget in February 2023; the deadline to submit FY2024 appropriations requests has now passed. We are aware of efforts at the federal level to advocate for VOCA dollars to be replenished by other funding sources and will provide more information on this as we have it.



The state of Illinois offset the cuts to VOCA by increasing funding for sexual assault services by 5 million dollars in FY24. This was 40% of the ask made to the Illinois General Assembly and falls short of restoring funding to FY23 levels or addressing decades of under-resourced services.

The city of Chicago has also invested 25 million into gender-based violence services. This was the first time the city directly supported funding to **rape crisis centers**, but more funding is needed.

### **I heard Domestic Violence (DV) services just got millions in increased funding last year.**

They did. While our efforts, services, and values often overlap, our funding from the state is completely different. The State of Illinois divides the funding between domestic violence centers and sexual assault centers. State policymakers may believe they funded sexual assault work when in reality it was only DV centers that were provided the increase. We **both** needed to be adequately funded.

### **How much money does the state currently provide?**

Sexual assault and domestic violence services have been drastically underfunded for years. The reality is VOCA exacerbated a longstanding funding inequity. In the last 20 years, rape crisis services have only received an increase of \$2.3 million in General Revenue funding, all while the cost of living and inflation has soared higher.

Our current funding equates to only \$365 per survivor served by Illinois rape crisis centers annually. It also equates to the inability to appropriately compensate advocates and therapists available to survivors 24 hours a day through our hotlines, partner hospitals, and offices.

### **What did we want the state to provide?**

Illinois' 31 rape crisis centers were asking for an increase of \$12 million to current state General Revenue Funds for rape crisis services. This would increase ICASA's total General Revenue funding to \$20 million. Last year rape crisis centers served 21,928 survivors. An increase to \$20 million means the invaluable counseling and advocacy services survivors receive is only costing the state approximately \$900 per survivor.

### **If we can't increase funding for sexual assault services, what happens?**



Survivors of sexual assault, rape crisis centers, and their employees will bear the burden. Services like 24-hour medical advocacy will cease to exist. There will be months-long waitlists for legal advocacy, crisis intervention, and trauma therapy, which will delay care, safety, and justice. Crisis centers will face hiring freezes and layoffs, meaning there will be fewer advocates and therapists who are able to provide support, information, and options in the aftermath of sexual assault. Ultimately, assisting survivors in their healing journey will become more difficult than it already is.

### **What will happen to Resilience?**

Annually Resilience provides crisis intervention, advocacy, and trauma therapy services to nearly 2,000 survivors each year. Nearly two-thirds of our client base identifies as BIPOC and a small but important 15% as LGBTQ+ (based on those who shared this information). In preparation for these cuts, Resilience has already had to freeze three vacant positions. This includes two full-time advocates and one full-time trauma therapist. The impact of these freezes alone equates to hundreds of survivors who will not be served through these roles. Without funding to offset these cuts, Resilience will be forced to continue to downsize or cut services impacting the communities we know need it the most.