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New crime victim legislation would provide funding for local groups

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 By **Sanne Specht**
 Mail Tribune

Proposed legislation designed to free up federal money earmarked for victims of crimes has local assistance organizations hopeful.

The Crime Victims Fund Preservation Act (HR 3402) and the Victims of Crime Act Preservation Fund Act (HR 483) would free up hundreds of millions of dollars of federal resources for victims of crime and organizations that support them — such as the Jackson County Children's Advocacy Center, the Jackson County District Attorney Victim Assistance Program, the Jackson County Sexual Assault Resource Team and Community Works — without raising any taxes on the public, said Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore.

Walden was at Children's Advocacy Center Saturday, announcing he is one of four Republicans and nine Democrats co-sponsoring the bills. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., is a co-sponsor of the Senate version of the bill.

"Organizations on the front lines that provide invaluable services to victims of crime should not be forced to fight an annual battle over a fund that was set up solely to provide victims assistance," Walden said in a prepared statement.

The current cap on the The Crime Victims Fund, established in 1984 by the Victims of Crime Act, is \$705 million. The rainy-day reserve holds more than \$2.2 billion. As crime victims' needs and the costs of programs to serve them continue to increase, the distribution cap becomes even more restrictive for local services that depend on federal money, Walden said.

HR 3402 would increase the annual cap on funds distributed to support victims while maintaining a rainy-day fund of at least \$800 million. Under the bill, minimum funding would grow from \$705 million for fiscal year 2010 to \$1.6 billion for fiscal year 2014.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 336,000 fewer crime victims received assistance services through the Victims of Crime Act in 2008 than during the previous year.

VOCA money is dedicated solely to supporting services to help crime victims. The money comes entirely from fines and other penalties paid by federal criminal offenders, not from taxpayers. Grants go to programs such as the Children's Advocacy Center, the Sexual Assault Resource Team and others that provide service to victims of all types of crimes including domestic violence, sexual assault and drunk driving, said Marlene Mish, CAC director.

"This is about every agency who treats every victim in the state," Mish said.

The Victims of Crime Act Preservation Fund Act (HR 483) protects the rainy-day reserves from being used for anything other than victim assistance programs, said Mish.

"I'm really hoping this bill passes and that the money will make its way to the people for whom it was meant," she said.

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