

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 1, 2010

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chairwoman
The Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

As you begin work on the Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2011, we respectfully request that you raise the cap on spending from the Crime Victims Fund. Due to a growing need for these funds nationwide, coupled with a growing balance in the Fund, we request a 2011 VOCA cap of at least \$867 million.

The Administration has recommended the FY 2011 cap be set at \$800 million. While this is an increase of \$95 million in non-taxpayer funds over the 2010 cap, the Administration is also proposing new and expanded use of VOCA set-asides. These include a new \$100 million Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) grant program targeted for specific violence against women initiatives as well as significant expansions of funding for the United States Attorneys' Offices and FBI victim assistance programs. Unfortunately, the Administration's recommended VOCA cap is not enough to offset these additional VOCA spending initiatives and, as a result, state VOCA victim assistance grants – those which fund the majority of VOCA's core programs in every state – could be cut by as much as \$20 million.

The Crime Victims Fund supports both crime victim compensation, which pays many of the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by victims as a result of crime, and victim assistance programs, which provide victims with support and guidance in the aftermath of crime. Approximately 4,400 VOCA-funded local and state victim service agencies help more than 4 million victims a year. VOCA assistance grants support programs that provide critical services to victims of all kinds of crime including victims of assault, robbery, gang violence, intoxicated drivers, fraud, elder abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, stalking and survivors of homicide, and many others. VOCA also supports victim assistance for those involved in the federal criminal justice system, including survivors of terrorist acts.

Most recently available data from the OVC indicate that VOCA assistance funds paid for more than 20,500 full-time equivalent jobs. The ability to recruit and retain trained advocates is essential to maintaining quality services for crime victims, particularly given that nowadays advocates and counselors typically work beyond capacity to meet the needs of victims and survivors. Raising the cap will translate directly into more jobs.

As our country faces a difficult economic situation, the need for critical victim assistance services continues to grow. National victim hotlines have reported as much as a 25-percent increase in calls, many of which are tied to recent financial stress.

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Local shelters and crisis lines are also reporting increased demand. The most-recent census by the National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that 9,280 requests for services on one day in 2009 went unmet.

The census noted that “many programs reported a critical shortage of funds and staff to fully assist victims in need of services such as transportation, childcare, language translation, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and legal representation.”

In recent years the balance of the Fund has dramatically increased. The Office of Management and Budget projects that the Fund will grow by \$1.4 billion this year alone. Thus, there is more than enough money in the Fund to help address the increasing need for additional assistance services without jeopardizing the Fund’s long-term sustainability.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to raise the 2011 VOCA cap to at least \$867 million. This funding level will provide state VOCA victim assistance with funds to address the growing need for more victim assistance services without jeopardizing the Fund’s stability. We also request that the Administration’s proposed set-aside of \$100 million for victims of domestic violence be funded from the remaining balance in the Fund, resulting in a total of \$967 million released from the Fund for FY 2011.

Thank you for your leadership in this critical area and for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY


MIKE CRAPO


CARL LEVIN

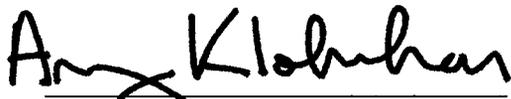

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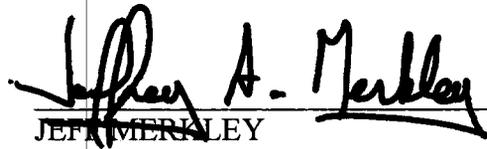

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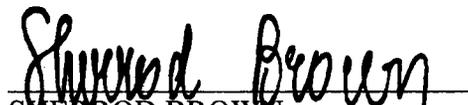

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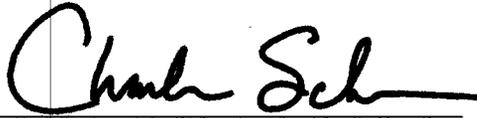

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JOHN KERRY



CHARLES E. SCHUMER

cc: The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye, Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations