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February 15, 2024

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Public Safety Committee
1020 N Street, Room 111
Sacramento CA 95814

RE: AB 1956 (Reyes) – Continuity and stability for crime victim services – SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member McCarty,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong support for AB 1956 (Reyes), which would allocate state funds to help fill the gap if federal grant funding falls 10% or more below the amount awarded in the prior year for the continuity and stability of crime victim services.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), through the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), is the largest federal funding source for victim service providers. VOCA funds essential services that crime victims need access to, such as rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, child abuse programs, court appointed special advocates, legal assistance, human trafficking services, and more.

Our programs and the victims we serve are facing what can only be described as a catastrophe. While the CVF allocation of \$1.9 billion that was included in the final FY23 federal budget provides level VOCA allocations, the proposed \$1.2 billion in President's FY24 budget and the FY24 House and Senate appropriations bills roughly equates to a 40% cut, as compared to FY23. At this proposed funding level, thousands of victim service providers across the state and the nation will be forced to lay off staff, cut programs, and/or shut their doors. The impact will fall hardest on the smallest programs, particularly programs in rural communities and low-income communities.

Here in Kern, VOCA grants fund our District Attorney's Victim Services Division and our Family Justice Center. VOCA accounts for over 85% of all funding for the division and has allowed the department to serve an average of 5,300 people per year over the prior 6 years. In calendar year 2023 alone, just over 5,700 people were served, with over 3,800 of them receiving services for the first time. Based on preliminary estimates, Kern stands to lose over \$1.15 million in VOCA funding. The impacts of these reductions would mean the loss of key staff and the reduction or elimination of services for over 3,600 victims of assault, child physical abuse or neglect, sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse or neglect, human trafficking (both for labor and sex), attempted homicide survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors of discrimination and abuse, and the homeless.

In addition to the County's direct services, our community-based organizations like the Open Door Network, Trauma Recovery Center, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, and Women's Center High Desert would likely experience similar reductions in funding and staff for their operations.

Given these dire potential consequences, on behalf of the victims and survivors we all serve, the Kern County Board of Supervisors strongly supports this bill and respectfully requests that you vote **YES** on **AB 1956**.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Honorable Members, Assembly Public Safety Committee
Honorable Members, Kern County Legislative Delegation
CA Partnership to End Domestic Violence
CA Victim Compensation Board, Bakersfield Trauma Recovery Centers
Kern County District Attorney
The Open Door Network
Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance
Women's Center High Desert
California State Association of Counties
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange