

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

SUPERVISORS

Phillip Peters District 1
Zack Scrivner District 2
Jeff Flores District 3
David Couch District 4
Leticia Perez District 5



KATHLEEN KRAUSE
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Kern County Administrative Center
1115 Truxtun Avenue, 5th Floor
Bakersfield, CA 93301
Telephone (661) 868-3585
TTY Relay (800) 735-2929

February 9, 2024

The Honorable Laphonza Butler
U.S. Senate
G10 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Valadao
U.S. House of Representatives
2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Alex Padilla
U.S. Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jay Obernolte
U.S. House of Representatives
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Prevent Catastrophic Cuts to Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grants

Dear Delegates,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to request urgent action to prevent catastrophic cuts to Victims of Crime Act ("VOCA") grants. We greatly appreciate the sustained funding that this Congress has regularly provided each year in the annual appropriations process, most recently in the final FY23 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) budget. We are also grateful that in 2021, you supported efforts to fix the long-term challenge of decreased deposits into the Crime Victims Fund ("CVF") due to an increasing reliance by the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ") on deferred and non-prosecution agreements in white collar criminal cases. While this structural change was and still is a critical first step for the long-term health of the CVF, unfortunately it has not generated sufficient funding to resolve the CVF's historically low balance.

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 budget provides level VOCA allocations, the proposed \$1.2 billion in President's FY24 budget and the FY24 House and Senate CJS appropriations bills is a 40% cut, as compared to FY23. At this proposed funding level, thousands of victim service providers across 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. Victims nationwide will lose access to lifesaving and life-sustaining services that address child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse.

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, child 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 the dire potential consequences, on behalf of the victims and survivors we all serve, we ask that you invest adequate funding for VOCA in the final FY24 Appropriations budget without cutting other critical DOJ grant programs that provide vital victim services and protect public safety.

Sincerely,



David Couch, Chairman
Kern County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Honorable Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Honorable Members, House Committee on Appropriations
Kern County District Attorney
The Open Door Network
California Victim Compensation Board, Bakersfield Trauma Recovery Centers
Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance
Women's Center High Desert
National Association of Counties
Carpi & Clay