



In Dec. 2019 and Jan. 2020, the Ohio Victim Witness Association (OVWA) surveyed victim advocacy programs throughout Ohio about how the impact of decreased VOCA funding was affecting their services and communities. VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funding is distributed to states through the Department of Justice and is a critical funding source for victim services agencies across the country. These funds allow programs to provide victims and survivors of crime with services that are vitally needed after experiencing victimization.

Sixty-eight Ohio programs completed the survey. Key findings and recommendations from these survey results are provided in this report, based on the data provided and the professional opinions of OVWA.

AFTERMATH OF DECREASED VOCA FUNDING

Gone from victims and communities:

- Crisis hotlines for victims
- Financial assistance for human trafficking victims
- Counseling/therapy hours for victims trying to recover
- Transportation to critical places
- Groceries for victims seeking refuge in domestic violence shelters
- Support groups
- Funds for domestic violence victims seeking emergency shelter in local hotels
- Domestic violence shelter coverage leading to safety concerns for staff and shelter residents
- Advocacy and case management for victims navigating the criminal justice maze
- 24/7 supervision for domestic violence shelter residents
- Community outreach

Lost to workers and organizations:

- Hours and/or entire positions
- Health insurance
- Employee benefits
- Cost-of-living raises
- Manageable advocate caseloads as staff decreases and victim needs grow
- Continuing education opportunities
- Necessary resources to fulfill job requirements
- Mileage and travel expenses
- Unrestricted funds to compensate for VOCA funding losses
- Office equipment budgets

41% of survey respondents reported they had to cut staff, including:

- Human trafficking advocates
- Rape crisis center staff
- Domestic violence shelter staff
- 24/7 crisis hotline staff
- Court advocates/direct service advocates
- Mental health counselors/therapists
- Case managers
- Intake specialists
- CASA coordinators
- Medical advocates

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS



We will simply have to close.

There will be less services for more and more victims.

We will be unable to ensure compliance with Marsy's Law.

VOCA funding is critical for our DV shelter's 2nd and 3rd shift staff.

We will have to close the program.

The underserved will not be able to receive services.

Our program is 99% funded by VOCA.

We will have to cut staff.

Services will be superficial as the number of victims increases and the number of staff decreases.

Our community will be impacted.





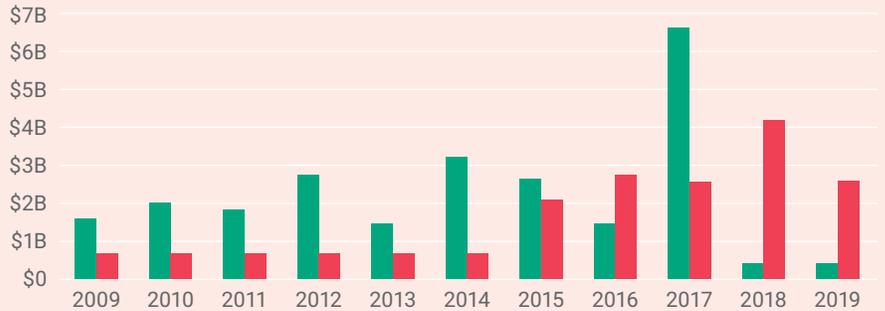
SEVERE HARM FROM VOCA FUNDING CUTS

VOCA FUNDING IS CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

Deposits into the Crime Victims Fund from federal prosecutions.

Allocations for states to distribute VOCA grants.

Allocations (red) are now much higher than Deposits (green), meaning more funds are being used to help victims than are being federally provided. This current trend is unsustainable.



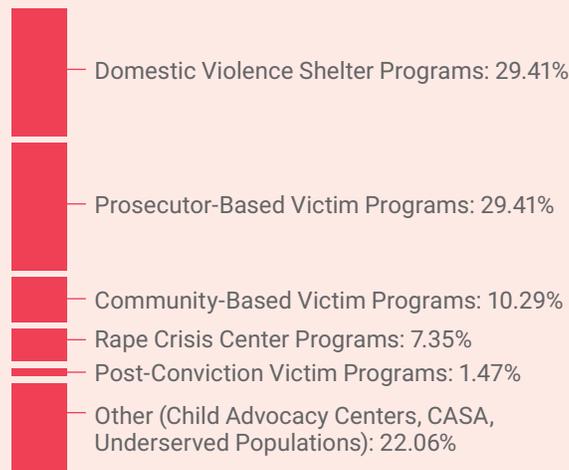
By the end of 2020, programs will have experienced a 57% decrease in VOCA funding.

WHY NOT JUST FIND FUNDING FROM OTHER PLACES?

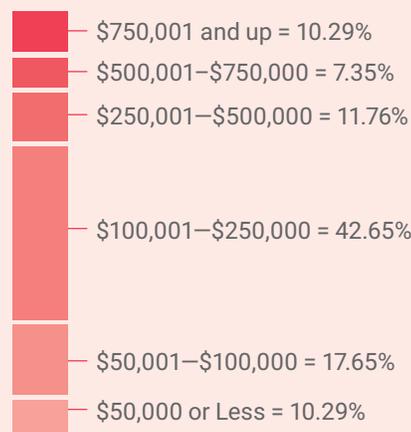
- Most grants and foundations support short-term projects, not long-term or ongoing programs.
- Government-based victim service programs (county prosecutor victim/witness divisions) are not eligible for many of these alternative funding sources or for donations/private money.
- Many local grants do not assist with employee salary and benefits. They can only be used to support the program/service itself.
- Not all counties have funding available through local foundations.
- Alternative funding is scarce in rural Ohio counties.
- Local grants and foundations are highly competitive and highly specific as to what they will fund.

The survey respondents were unanimous in saying that funding is highly competitive in their part of the state. There is a pattern in the inability to diversify funding because other funding options were not available in many of Ohio's counties.

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?



AMOUNT OF VOCA FUNDS RECEIVED



20 Average number of years respondents have been receiving VOCA funds

Most agencies have made staff and program cuts but are still serving the same number of victims or more, leaving program staff **overworked, underpaid, and without necessary resources** to fulfill their job requirements.



RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- ▶ **The VOCA funding decrease means programs can NOT meet the demand for services required by Marsy's Law, and pre-existing services will be negatively impacted.**
- ▶ Victim advocacy organizations are in dire need of stable and consistent funding sources.
- ▶ With the implementation of Marsy's Law, Prosecutor-Based Victim/Witness Divisions are **in need of a line item budget** to fund advocate positions and Marsy's Law compliance. With the increased need for advocates in the criminal justice system, Ohio can provide funding support through Marsy's Law.
- ▶ Victim advocacy programs in Ohio rely heavily on VOCA funding to maintain basic levels of service. Because of the lack of outside funding sources and lack of increases to VOCA funding, many programs will close or have limited operating expenses.
- ▶ Victim advocacy programs provide needed resources to victims of crime to aid in the recovery from trauma and their victimization. Crime victimization crosses socioeconomic lines and **could happen to anyone at any time**. When considered through this lens, it is easy to see why reduction in funding will leave our communities without assistance, services, or hope.¹
- ▶ The benefits of crime victim advocacy and services, at times, can be difficult to measure but become unequivocally clear when absent. Emotional healing, for example, is one of the lesser quantifiable outcomes of victim services and yet, it is one of the greater benefits that victims experience.¹
- ▶ Victim advocates working in prosecution offices have a distinct responsibility to explain the legal process, educate on victims' rights, offer services, and act as a liaison between law enforcement, attorneys and the court.¹
- ▶ The advocate's primary role and focus of care are to assess and identify the immediate physical, emotional, psychological, and financial needs of the victim while establishing rapport. Direct advocacy services are a fundamental component of crime victim advocacy and general consist of the following¹:
 - Emergency deployment to critical incidents/scenes of mass victimization
 - Attending child forensic interviews and sexual assault examinations
 - Protective order assistance
 - Victim impact statements
 - Crisis intervention
 - Court accompaniment
 - Explaining the criminal justice process
 - Offering and/or coordinating interpreter services
 - Accompaniment to law enforcement and prosecution interviews
 - Accompaniment to parole board hearings
- ▶ Much of the static funding levels were due to a cap placed on the VOCA fund through Congress, limiting the distribution of the funds. In 2013, a major victory for programs happened when that cap was lifted. In the state of Ohio, programs were able to play "catch up" and request additional funding to support existing programs and services in an attempt to expand services to more victims and survivors. This increase helped these programs increase personnel to meet the demands of the last 20 years.
- ▶ While funding has long been lacking for victim services, that has not stopped Ohio from continuing to push for stronger legislative protections for victims of crime. The passage of Marsy's Law is the most recent example of this hard work and with it, creates a larger need that effects advocacy programs, especially prosecutor based programs. Prosecutor based advocacy programs rely very heavily on VOCA and SVAA funds because as government agencies, they are ineligible for other funding sources that many non-profits have access to. They are also the main service providers that will be affected by the implementation of Marsy's Law. There is an immediate need to add staff to be able to meet the demands of Marsy's Law without impacting existing services to victims of violent crime.

¹ Denise Pearson-Jordan, CA, CCI. "Crime Victim Advocacy and Services" (Fall 2019) *Journal for the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress*, pp. 27-29.