



THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

October 15, 2021

VIA EMAIL
Governor Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: ARPA Funding for Survivors

Dear Governor Hogan,

We write to strongly urge you to take immediate action to ensure victims of crime in Maryland have the services they need.

As we have all known for several years, federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds have been decreasing. Fortunately, this summer, Congress passed the bi-partisan legislation to fix this problem. This means that in two or three years, our State will once again have federal funds available to help Marylanders who are victims of state or federal crimes. But victims of crime need help now. So we are asking that you take steps to fill in the dip in VOCA funding that went into effect two weeks ago. Maryland is fortunate that we have both federal and state funds available to help vulnerable victims of crime. There are millions of dollars in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and billions of dollars in state funds that can be used to prevent cuts in victim services. Victim service providers are facing an unprecedented demand for services which is further exacerbated by labor shortages, exhausted experts, and the expense of providing secure virtual services and workplaces.

Victim services funding in Maryland supports rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, child advocates and child advocacy centers, anti-sex trafficking programs including for child victims of sex trafficking, victim-witness coordinators in State's Attorneys Offices, programs for homicide survivors, and other programs helping victims and survivors of crime. These services were already in high demand throughout the pandemic as rates of violence surged and they continued to meet the needs of survivors. Now these providers are facing \$11 million in federal funding cuts. We urge the State to demonstrate its commitment to the victim service provider community and Marylanders who are victims of crime by remedying the funding crisis.

Increased Demand

The needs of victims of crime continue to surpass and outpace the capacity of victim service providers due to an unprecedented demand for services. Since the beginning of the pandemic, intimate partner violence has increased over 8% which amounts to 2,500 additional victims in Maryland. Perpetrators are emboldened by the pandemic and crime victims are facing extraordinary challenges. The demand for victim services most notably soared when State Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, and survivors were in a greater position to seek services. For children, lock-downs meant they were not in contact with mandated reporters of abuse. When lock-downs were lifted, reports of child abuse went up. Experts working with survivors of violent crime also report that the severity of abuse has increased and the complexity of the cases has grown as a result of the pandemic. Survivors need more types of services including housing, financial, mental and behavioral health, counseling, and legal assistance. The pandemic has also exacerbated past traumas and victims of crime find themselves needing more support.

Victim service providers now have waitlists for services, and without state intervention those lists will grow longer and Maryland's victims will need to wait for potential life-saving services. We must provide the victim service providers with sufficient funds to compensate and retain experienced staff to serve Maryland's victims.

State Funding

Now is the time for State action. President Biden signed into law the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) Fix bill which will eventually provide more federal dollars to state victim service providers. However, Maryland victims cannot wait for those dollars to reach them or the service providers. Victim service providers are already making plans to reduce staff and services based on the October 1st funding cuts that were announced September 24th. State funding would provide the bridge desperately needed to transition to the federal funding in the pipeline.

We urge you to allocate more State dollars in both the current and next year's budget to address the impending funding shortfall. It is our obligation as a State to ensure that the victim service provider community is adequately funded to properly serve the survivors of crime in our State.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding

Maryland has expert community based victim services providers in every jurisdiction in the State and we can be proud of developing and supporting this critical safety net for children, women and men who have been victims of crime. However, Maryland's victim services providers have suffered negative economic impacts from the COVID pandemic. Support for victim services fall clearly under the purposes of the federal funding designed to help us weather the pandemic. Therefore, we urge you to use ARPA funding to continue support for all established victim services providers across the State. We ask that you pay particular attention to the economic impact of the pandemic. Rules and regulations issued from the U.S. Department of the Treasury about the allowable uses of ARPA funds specifically state the need to support victim services as "the stay-at-home order and other pandemic responses may have also reduced the ability of individuals affected by domestic violence to access services."

Please apply ARPA funding as intended to address public health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting victim service providers in Maryland.

Victims of Crime Need Our Help

As elected officials, we spend countless hours debating the best responses to crime, how to create safe communities, and how to prevent violence. It is vital that we also recognize and support the needs of victims of crime. These are Marylanders who have been raped and abused. These are children who have been hurt. These are brave witnesses testifying against offenders in criminal trials. These are victims and survivors who need the support that Maryland's expert victim services programs can provide.

When we fail to prevent crime, the least we can do is help the victims of crime recover and help to stop what can be a dangerous cycle. Please fix the victim services funding dip.

Sincerely,

Senator	Pam Beidle	Delegate	Cathi Forbes
Senator	Joanne Benson	Delegate	David Fraser-Hidalgo
Senator	Jill P. Carter	Delegate	Michele Guyton
Senator	Sarah Elfreth	Delegate	Terri L. Hill
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