

{DATE}

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

To Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned organizations which advocate on behalf of survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking, represent millions of survivors of gender-based violence and harassment, the professionals who serve these survivors, the faith organizations that support them, and the communities that care about them throughout the United States and territories.

We write to urge you to address the urgent and emerging needs of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors and the programs that serve them during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and resulting disruptions. It is imperative that the next stimulus package address survivors' needs - directly and via the programs that serve them.

Requests for COVID-19 Phase Four Response Package

Overview:

- Department of Justice:
 - \$100 million in emergency funding for the Sexual Assault Services Program (OVW) to assist rape crisis centers in transitioning to virtual services and meeting the emergency needs of survivors;
 - \$225 million in emergency VAWA funding (OVW) to be distributed to the states and territories for victim services with funding streams for Tribes and culturally specific services;
 - \$10 million for Outreach to Underserved Populations (OVW);
 - \$40 million for the Transitional Housing Program (OVW);
 - Waive the match requirement and enact legislation to increase deposits for the Victims of Crime Act, Crime Victims Fund (OVC);
- Department of Health and Human Services:
 - \$100 million for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and waive matching requirement;
- Department of Housing and Urban Development:
 - \$100 million for HUD Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus to provide specialized housing for survivors experiencing homelessness and waive matching requirement; and

- \$20 million in VAWA emergency transfer tenant protection voucher assistance for rental assistance for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking eligible for assistance under 34 U.S.C. § 12491(e).
- Economic supports for survivors:
 - Provide paid leave that covers as many workers as possible and includes safe leave for survivors; and
 - Ensure that survivors who need to separate from employment because of the threat that accompanies social distancing have the option to quit their jobs and seek unemployment insurance even if paid leave, telework or work from home are available to them;
- Immigrant rights across agencies:
 - Ensure immigrants have access to health, safety, and stability, including access to COVID-19 testing and treatment, and restricting immigration enforcement.

The need:

As the nation is increasingly mandated or urged to stay home or social distance to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we are starkly reminded that “home” is an unsafe place for those experiencing domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse. This time of heightened economic, health, familial, and emotional stress also means that those who have experienced trauma in the past are finding it harder to cope. Housing, economic, legal, advocacy, and physical and mental healthcare supports are critical to protect survivors from further harm. Simultaneously, direct service providers are grappling with the unprecedented challenge of housing survivors and providing life-saving services while following distance and separation protocols. Marginalized survivors face additional threats and barriers to health and safety, e.g., heightened vulnerabilities due to chronic underlying conditions, geographic and language barriers to resources and healthcare, and food insecurity.

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking are disproportionately impacted by this crisis, and **the federal government’s response must be swift and specific to meet the needs of all survivors, including survivors of color, Native survivors, immigrant survivors, LGBTQ survivors, survivors with disabilities, survivors who are older adults, and survivors from other underserved communities.** The phase four supplemental appropriations bill must contain funding for community-based domestic violence and sexual assault organizations; must ensure everyone has access to domestic violence and sexual assault services and COVID-19-related programs and benefits; and must include provisions to meet the long-term victim-service needs created by the COVID-19 crisis.

Appropriations:

Existing funding streams must be increased and administrative burdens must be reduced to ensure that programs can meet survivors’ safety, medical, economic, housing and stabilization needs with a focus on marginalized and Native communities. We call on Congress to increase the following funding streams:

- **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP)** by at least \$100 million to help rape crisis centers transition to virtual services and respond to the urgent needs of survivors;
- **Family Violence Prevention and Services Act** by at least an additional \$100 million to provide shelter, and alternative housing, and services to survivors and their families, and specialized services for children and technical assistance to address the emerging needs of the field responding to COVID-19;
- **VAWA supplemental funding to the states and territories for victim services (distributed according to the STOP distribution formula at 34 U.S.C. 10446(b)(1) and (b)(5-6))** by at least \$225 million.
 - Supplemental funding shall be distributed to victim service providers (as defined at 34 U.S.C. § 12291(a)(43)) in order to provide victim services (as defined at 34 U.S.C. §12291(a)(44)).
 - Funding should acknowledge the disparities faced in American Indian and Alaska Native communities and honor tribal sovereignty by providing equitable resources to American Indian and Alaska Native communities directly to address domestic violence.
 - 10% of the supplemental funding shall be distributed to Tribal governments to supplement existing Tribal programs; and
 - Funding should be allocated with the acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities and the chronic underinvestment in these communities.
 - Of this funding, the greater of 20% or \$25 million shall be distributed to eligible entities under 34 U.S.C. § 20124(c), with equitable distribution of funding between services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and including the provision of technical assistance to support service provision;
- **VAWA Outreach and Services to Underserved Populations** grants by \$10 million;
- **VAWA transitional housing** by \$40 million;
- **HUD Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus** by \$100 million to provide specialized housing for survivors experiencing homelessness; and
- \$20 million in **VAWA emergency transfer tenant protection voucher assistance** for rental assistance for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking eligible for assistance under 34 U.S.C. § 12491(e).

Eliminating barriers to accessing supplemental funding:

At a time when programs need emergency funding, it is critical that grant recipients have maximum flexibility. This can be provided in part by **temporarily reducing procedural bureaucratic burdens** such as by:

- Eliminating matching fund requirements for VOCA, HUD Continuum of Care Funding, and VAWA funding obligated during the COVID-19 crisis and for the duration of the resulting economic fallout;
- Reducing documentation requirements, time-limitations and any other burdens that slow down access to funds for rental assistance;
- Allowing all relevant funds to be used to provide temporary, individual accommodations, such as hotel or motel vouchers; and

- Allowing the federal administering agencies to hire staff to help ensure efficient distribution of funds.

Victims of Crime Act

The increased need resulting from COVID-19 will extend long past the end of the pandemic response, and programs must be able to meet both the immediate and long term needs of survivors, Congress must **increase deposits into the Crime Victims Fund (CVF)** by requiring direct penalties and fines from federal deferred and non-prosecution agreements that are currently being deposited in the General Treasury to be deposited into the CVF.

Economic supports

Survivors of domestic and sexual violence have unique barriers to gaining and maintaining employment. Congress should address this by:

- Providing paid leave that covers as many workers as possible and includes **safe leave for survivors**;
- Ensuring that survivors, who need to separate from employment because of threats of violence that accompany social distancing, have the option to quit their jobs and seek **unemployment insurance** even if paid leave, telework or work from home are available to them; and
- Ensuring any **distribution plan for cash assistance/Recovery Rebates** to individuals accounts for survivors who are in undisclosed locations or have recently separated from an abusive partner.

Immigrant victims and survivors

Even before the pandemic, immigrant survivors were facing additional and unique barriers to accessing services that promote and maintain their health and safety. In order to improve access to health, safety, and stability for all victims, Congress must:

- Expand **Medicaid eligibility** to ensure access to testing and treatment for everyone, regardless of immigration status;
- Allow people who have filed taxes with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers to access **Recovery Rebates**;
- **Restrict immigration enforcement** against survivors by:
 - Prohibiting immigration detention and the removal of those with pending humanitarian immigration applications;
 - Significantly reducing the overall population of people in Customs and Border Patrol custody;
 - Preventing Immigration and Customs Enforcement measures at all sensitive locations, including to ensure unimpeded access to law enforcement assistance and court services;
- Mandating that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other federal agencies create **flexibility with respect to immigration procedural requirements** to ensure that difficulties complying at this time do not mean permanent denials of protection;
- Requiring DHS automatically **extend or renew immigration statuses and work authorization** for immigrants that have expired or will expire during the crisis; and
- Ensuring that all federal agencies provide **meaningful language access** for limited English-Proficient survivors to COVID-19 related information and supports pursuant

to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, as well as providing additional funding to facilitate interagency coordination among agencies activated through the National Response Framework based on language access standards and **providing additional resources to community-based organizations that have established relationships with hard-to-reach populations.**

Conclusion

Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault are facing extreme danger at the same time that programs and systems will struggle to respond. We strongly urge you to address these dire needs by investing more resources to address the unique needs of survivors and securing needed policy changes as a matter of urgency.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Monica McLaughlin at the National Network to End Domestic Violence (mmclaughlin@nnev.org), Rachel Graber at the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (rgraber@ncadv.org), and Terri Poore at the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (terri@endsexualviolence.org).

Sincerely,