



IT'S MORE THAN A CRISIS; *IT'S A CRIME!*

Victim of Crime Act funding to be slashed; victims lose in the end.

One only needs to look at the daily headlines in any newspaper across the country to comprehend the magnitude of personal crimes committed against innocent persons, many of whom are simply at the wrong place at the wrong time, minding their own business, simply doing the right thing.

In any single moment across this county, lives will be ended by drunk drivers, children will be tortured and abused, women will be raped and beaten, loved ones will be murdered, others will be robbed and assaulted...it is a list that goes on and on. Despite their unique circumstances, there is one common denominator – innocent people have now become a statistic carrying a new label...that of crime victim.

And in the end, a new identity emerges. It is an identity that brings with it trepidation and intimidation, physical injury, and emotional trauma as they view the world through a new lens, face new vulnerabilities and know new realities. At the same time, they enter the complex and frequently overwhelming criminal justice system – as a witness in the case that the state brings against the alleged criminal or as a bystander (in the event of a murder victim).

Vital to their efforts to heal and negotiate the systems that stand ready to acknowledge them is funding through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) that provides supportive services to minimize the impact of victimization upon the victims of personal, often violent crimes. Such services include emergency assistance/shelter, counseling, advocacy, and assistance in negotiating the criminal justice system, in addition to financial compensation for loss of work and medical and funeral expenses resulting from crime victimization. The monies that fund VOCA *do not come from taxpayers*; instead, they are generated from the collection of Federal criminal fines, forfeitures and special assessments.

In FY 2003, 3.8 million crime victims were recipients of VOCA-funded assistance that enabled crucial interventions to help them heal from the trauma of their insidious fate, while providing needed financial assistance to minimize egregious expenses resulting from emergency room services, funeral expenses, and loss-of-work. In Pennsylvania alone, there were more than 137,860 crime victims who received 359,406 direct service

interventions. *Fact is, no one deserves to be a crime victim, but every crime victim deserves to have access to services that reduces the impact of traumatic victimization and further gives them the tools and resources to move forward.*

Yet, VOCA funding is on the brink of collapse. Not from bankruptcy per se, but from politics. Under the current Administration efforts are underway to rescind the entire Fund at the end of FY 2006, diverting funds into other areas that are not victim-related; leaving in its wake a path of crippling destruction that will result in the loss of critical services for millions of victims of crime nationwide and thousands upon thousands of victims in Pennsylvania.

Crime occurs at any time of the day, in communities large and small, among all races, genders, and socio-economic classes and no one is immune. Fact is, we all are vulnerable; yet each of us can do something to preserve this deserved right. All you need to do is contact your federal legislators, beginning with Senator Arlen Specter (202-224-4254), Senator Rick Santorum (202-224-6324) or the state representative serving your area. Urge them to reject the Administration's recommendation to rescind VOCA funding and, in turn, preserve some semblance of justice for us all.

Delilah Rumburg
Executive Director
717-728-9740