

2024-25 Budget Request

The Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect (PCAR) is a network of rape crisis centers working to eliminate all forms of sexual violence and to advocate for the rights and needs of survivors in all 67 counties. The work that we do goes beyond advocating for victims: we contribute to more positive criminal justice outcomes, increase family well-being, and overall improve the communities where we provide services. PCAR and its programs rely on appropriation in the state budget allocated to the Department of Human Services (DHS) via the Rape Crisis line item.

PCAR is grateful to the Pennsylvania General Assembly for their commitment towards preventing and addressing sexual violence throughout the Commonwealth. **Yet, we ask you to consider, what would your community look like without the presence of a rape crisis center?**

Rape Crisis Line Item Since 2018:

FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	FY2021/22	FY2022/23	FY2023/24
\$9.928M	\$10.921M	\$10.921M	\$11.921M	\$11.921M	\$11.921M

With level funding for over five years, rape crisis centers are struggling to stay afloat. **The Rape Crisis line item is in immediate need of a meaningful increase.** Advocates are continually asked to do more with less. No increase in funding is a conscious choice not to serve victims of sexual violence.



PCAR is requesting a \$5M increase to the FY2024/25 Rape Crisis line item, bringing the total to \$16.921M.

Rape crisis centers (RCCs) are lifelines to victims and their families throughout the Commonwealth. Most services offered by RCCs are free of charge. They provide 24-hour hotline services to survivors in crisis; language interpretation services; counseling for victims and their families; legal assistance; accompaniment to medical, police, and court; support groups; employment assistance; they advocate for survivors with complex needs; and more.

Number of people served in FY2022/23:

ADULTS	CHILDREN	TOTAL
21,703	7,466	29,169

Survivors depend on these life changing services.

24-Hour Hotline

For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, 19,221 hotline calls were answered. Operating a 24hr hotline is one of the many unique yet challenging services provided by rape crisis centers and independently demonstrates the 24/7 nature of our work. Many victims make the brave choice to call the hotline, often the first point of contact with trauma-informed services. Survivors must have access to a properly funded and fully staffed hotline.

Medical Advocacy

RCCs provide trauma-informed accompaniment services to victims who undergo forensic sexual assault examinations at healthcare facilities. A forensic examination serves multiple purposes including evidence collection and preservation and essential medical care. Not only do advocates provide emotional support during medical accompaniments, but they also offset the demands and burdens of health care professionals by explaining to victims their rights and kit-testing options. Some RCCs utilize dedicated volunteers for medical accompaniments; however, the COVID-19 pandemic tapered the number of volunteers greatly, shifting the responsibility of this vital service back to overworked center employees.

Legal Advocacy

Navigating the legal system is daunting, and often retraumatizing, for victims of sexual assault. The support of an advocate to inform them of their rights, prepare them for the legal experience, and refer them to community resources is paramount to ensuring a survivor is not further traumatized during the court process. Victims with legal representation are more likely to obtain much needed legal protections.

PCAR's Sexual Violence Legal Assistance Project (SVLAP) provides free and confidential trauma-informed legal advice and short-term legal representation to victims. The project fills existing gaps where local community legal services are unavailable and priority is given to victims of non-intimate partner sexual assault. Additional funding is needed to expand victims' access to legal representation.

Prevention Education

RCCs work to end sexual violence by preventing sexual assault, abuse, and harassment from occurring. RCCs provide prevention training to workplaces, community groups, places of worship, and other organizations in all of Pennsylvania's communities. We collaborate with schools and other local service providers to protect our children and youth from sexual violence. For the safety of our communities, rape crisis centers must receive adequate funding so these important prevention services can continue and expand.

Providing a Living Wage

Turnover and inability to maintain fully staffed centers is directly tied to lack of funding and the inability to provide advocates and center staff with a living wage. Some centers are only able to pay employees between \$10.50 and \$12.00 per hour. Rape crisis centers hire subject matter experts to provide high-quality care to survivors and their families. Specialized training is required to support victims according to the principles of best practices and trauma-informed service provision. Rape crisis center staff are held to this high standard not only because it is what survivors deserve, but because it's legally mandated in our Commonwealth. Even with required training, not everyone can work at a rape crisis center, due to the 24/7 nature of this vocation and its strenuous emotional demands. The longer our employees are asked to make do in a short-staffed workplace, the more difficult they are to retain.

No increase in funding - realistically a cut - limits the number of services that can be provided to victims, forces RCCs to freeze hiring, creates layoffs, and promotes employee burn out.

VOCA Cut

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is facing a 40% cut leaving victims across the Commonwealth and nationwide without access to lifesaving and life-sustaining victim services. VOCA funds help provide direct services like crisis intervention, medical accompaniment, legal accompaniment, and counseling to victims of sexual assault. The loss of these funds will incur unparalleled devastation on Pennsylvania's rape crisis centers.

We are repeatedly and consistently asked to do more with less and the lack of significant increases in our government fundings since 2018 has negatively impacted our ability to retain and recruit staff.

Rape crisis centers in Pennsylvania are facing a total decrease of VOCA \$1,194,091 in funding for FY2024/25. An increase in the Rape Crisis line item is vital to supplement this substantial loss in VOCA funding.

Questions?

Contact PCAR's policy director, Gabriella Romeo, at gromeo@pcar-respecttogether.org or 717-728-9740 x114.