

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

September 23, 2015

Dear Governor Haley:

This year an additional release of money from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) fund to the states resulted in several million extra dollars being made available for the provision of direct victim services. My understanding is that \$17 million dollars remain in the South Carolina award after the initial grant solicitation. Two additional solicitations have been released for VOCA funding for the period January 1 – September 30, 2016. The first of these restricted applications to one-time only equipment purchases or projects funding Law Enforcement Victim Advocates (LEVA). The second (released today) was restricted to vehicles or Solicitor Office-based Victim Advocates. I have written to the members of the Public Safety Coordinating Council at the Department of Public Safety to request that they consider expanding the scope of these special solicitations to encompass other areas.

The member organizations of SCCADVASA provide comprehensive services to victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence that include, but are not limited to, emergency shelter, crisis counseling, hotlines, transitional housing, legal advocacy, medical advocacy, financial advocacy, long term counseling and children's services. While recognizing the extremely important work that LEVA programs provide, it is important to recognize there are many reasons that a victim may choose not to engage with law enforcement. Many victims are initially reluctant to engage the criminal justice system due to a lack of familiarity, fear, or an encounter that was less than helpful. Specialized independent advocates can provide an essential bridge in a liaison capacity between victims and law enforcement, often enabling a more effective outcome within the justice system. Large numbers of victims opt for civil remedies initially, but may choose to pursue criminal justice options with the assistance of an advocate from a community-based organization offering comprehensive services.

The Domestic Violence State Report issued by DSS for FY 2013-2014 notes that only 28% of shelter residents report law enforcement involvement. The Sheriff's Office in one of the most populous counties in SC reports 41 total arrests for all CSC crimes (adult and minor) in 2014 while the Rape Crisis Center providing services in that same county reports serving a total of 426 survivors of sexual violence, 89 of whom did not report their victimization to law enforcement. Expanding the scope of this solicitation would increase the numbers of victims of domestic and sexual violence who would benefit from assistance in stabilizing their lives after victimization.

Guidance provided by OVC on how to use the increase in available funds in FY15 states that "OVC expects that VOCA administrators will meet with key stakeholder coalitions and groups, including those that represent the VOCA statutory priorities—domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse prevention—to conduct strategic planning for funding new programs and services and enhancing existing initiatives." It is also recommended that "Victim assistance grant recipients who have long-standing and proven track records of service to their communities should be given preference" to assist in building and institutionalizing capacity, and that underserved and marginalized communities (often those who are least likely to engage with law enforcement) are supported.

The large increase in available VOCA funds can potentially provide an unprecedented opportunity to increase and build the capacity of all victim services in our state. We, and our member organizations would welcome the opportunity to participate in meaningful strategic planning on how to most effectively utilize this funding so that the needs of victims in our state are met.

I would like to thank you again for your advocacy towards ending domestic violence in South Carolina. I hope you know that, although there is much work ahead, your voice and the work of your staff has been incredibly meaningful and powerful.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Sara Barber
Executive Director, SCCADVASA