

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_:

We, the undersigned organizations, write in support of *The Fairness to Victims of Crime Act of 2015,* to be introduced by Senators Pat Toomey and Chuck Schumer. We have worked closely with the drafters of this legislation and we wholly support the increased resources for victim services and provisions that improve the ability of advocates to support victims.

As organizations advocating for victims and survivors, we assist and work on behalf of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, trafficking, drunk driving, homicide and other crimes. We see the devastating effects of these crimes on both the victims and the communities in which they live. For victims to truly heal, it is critical they have access to needed recovery services, many of which are made available because of funding provided by the Crime Victims Fund.

Congress created the Crime Victims Fund in 1984 based on a simple idea: money the government collects from those who commit crimes should be used to help those victimized by crime. Each year, criminal fines and penalties collected in federal court are deposited into the Crime Victims Fund. The Department of Justice disburses money from this Fund to States and other entities to support victim compensation and assistance programs. It is important to note that the Fund receives no tax dollars.

Since fiscal year 2000, Congress has capped the amount of money disbursed from the Crime Victims Fund. The cap was originally intended to establish a more stable stream of funding. However, the cap on money disbursed from the Fund remained low, even as the amount of money deposited into the Fund has risen dramatically. For example, from fiscal year 2010 through fiscal year 2014, the Crime Victims Fund collected an average of $2 billion each year, but disbursed only an average of $700 million per year. The remaining $6.5 billion difference was used as a budgetary offset.

The result: at a time of record deposits into the Fund, victim services nationwide were struggling to meet the immediate needs of victims and survivors. Too many had growing waiting lists or were having to turn people away. Clearly, this is inconsistent with the purpose of the Victims of Crime Act

We were very pleased when, Congress raised the cap for fiscal year 2015 to over $2.3 billion, aligning the release with approximately the average of last three fiscal years’ deposits. The proposed legislation would build upon this progress and continue the higher level of disbursement and add new provisions to help funds best meet the needs of victims.

The bipartisan *Fairness for Victims of Crime Act* *of 2015*:

* provides a steady, predictable stream of funding by requiring that each year, the Department of Justice disburse from the Fund the average of the past 3 years’ intake—an estimated $2.6 billion for fiscal year 2016;
* directs a portion of this increased funding to the victim compensation programs that reimburse victims for their out-of-pocket expenses;
* creates a direct funding stream for tribal governments to ensure tribal victims have access to critical VOCA funds for victims assistance and compensation;
* ensures that crucial services are covered, such as the costs of medications that prevent sexual assault victims from contracting HIV/AIDS;
* lays the groundwork for a strong state planning process by requiring the Department of Justice to make recommendations for State planning for VOCA spending;
* strengthens victim services by increasing the funds states can use to train victim service professionals;
* gives the Office for Victims of Crime the ability to fund national victim services, including services to help Americans victimized overseas; and

The steady and increased release of funds along with key reforms will reduce the gap in resources and allow many more victims to receive desperately needed services. We urge members of the Senate to sign onto this important legislation as an original co-sponsors and supports its swift passage.

Sincerely,

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

National Center for Victims of Crime

National Children’s Alliance

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

National Congress of American Indians

National Domestic Violence Hotline

National Network to End Domestic Violence