Sign FY24 VOCAA Appropriations Letter to Support Funding For Children's Advocacy Centers

Sending Office: Honorable Ann Wagner

Sent By: Molly.JosephBurke@mail.house.gov

Support Children's Advocacy Centers in FY24 CJS Funding

DEADLINE: MARCH 29, 2023

Dear Colleague:

We invite you to join us in signing this letter encouraging the CJS Subcommittee to provide $50 million in funding for the Children’s Advocacy Center programs that are funded through the Victims of Child Abuse Act. Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) are public-private community partnerships that bring together law enforcement, prosecutors, child protective services, and the medical and mental health professions to investigate cases of severe child abuse. CACs are located in child-friendly facilities that enable the community to work together in caring for its youngest victims of sexual and physical abuse.

With more than 956 CACs nationwide serving more than 370,000 kids in the children’s advocacy centers, we are requesting $50 million in funding for these programs for FY24 to work towards not only closing the significant gap of additional cases of substantiated abuse that are currently not being served by a CAC, but also the impacts and ongoing continuing pressures of the past three years of the pandemic and to assist the additional 600,000+ reported cases of abuse needing a forensic interview that did not get one. This funding will ensure continued access for child abuse victims, and even more importantly, the increases to the program will ensure that the estimated 75,000 kids abused annually living in areas without access to Child Advocacy Centers and the 80,000+ kids at our centers needing mental health therapy that are able to receive it will get needed help to begin healing.

The Victims of Child Abuse Act provides funding for the development of Children’s Advocacy Centers and for the training and technical assistance of CACs and child abuse professionals through competitive grant funding. This competitive funding continues to be the cornerstone for new CAC development and expansion and a catalyst for other federal, state, local and private funding sources.

The funds provided for the Victims of Child Abuse Act programs through the appropriations process go directly to helping local CACs around the country in training needs, program development, and program support. Since 1992, more than 956 Local CAC, as well as 50 State Chapters, have been established in communities across the country and in more than 25 countries throughout the world. The number of children helped by CACs has almost quadrupled, growing from 100,539 in 2000 to more than 370,000 in 2022.

Providing $50 million in funding for the Victims of Child Abuse Act programs will ensure swift prosecutions for offenders, fewer victimizations, and ultimately, safer communities. Communities that use Children’s Advocacy Centers and multidisciplinary teams have a 94% conviction rate for CAC cases that are carried forward, and child victims of sexual abuse are four times more likely to receive forensic medical exams and increased referrals for mental health treatment than children served by non-CAC communities.

Please join us in requesting the minimum of $50 million for Victims of Child Abuse Act funding for FY24. Please sign using this Quill link. For questions, please contact Kit Devine at kit.devine@mail.house.gov (Rep. Costa) or Molly Joseph at Molly.Joseph@mail.house.gov (Rep. Wagner) by COB on March 29. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ann Wagner

Member of Congress

Jim Costa

Member of Congress

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Cartwright:

We write to thank the subcommittee for its continued support for the Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) by fully funding programs established by the Victims of Child Abuse Act. The Victims of Child Abuse Act authorizes funding for CACs, permits the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to establish grants designed to improve child abuse investigation and prosecution programs, and provides grants to national organizations to better train attorneys and other individuals instrumental to prosecuting child abuse cases. All funding is competitively awarded and is the cornerstone for new CAC development and expansion, while also acting as a catalyst for other federal, state, local, and private funding sources. With this in mind, we respectfully request that you again support this critically important program and urge you to fund the program at a minimum of $50 million in the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2024.

CACs and their multidisciplinary team (MDT) partners provide an efficient, cost-effective mechanism for handling cases of severe child abuse, and are strongly supported by law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary. The funding for this program goes directly to local CACs around the country in the form of grants for program support, and for training and technical assistance of CACs and their MDT partners, including specific training for prosecutors on this model. Since 1992, more than 956 Local CACs, as well as 50 State Chapters, have been established in communities across the country and in more than 25 countries throughout the world. The number of children helped by CACs has almost quadrupled, growing from 100,539 in 2000 to more than 370,000 in 2022. Unfortunately, according to the Department of Health and Human Services’ annual Child Maltreatment Reports, there continues to be a gap of an additional 600,000+ cases of suspected abuse that need a CAC forensic interview and aren’t getting one, and an estimated 250,000 additional cases of substantiated abuse with no access to a CAC at all. And while the pandemic initially saw a drop in reports of suspected abuse by more than 50% nationwide, this was not the result of a sudden drop in cases of abuse – just in cases that were reported due to the pandemic closures and protocols. All throughout the pandemic, CACs remained open and continued to see emergency cases, seeing significant increases in severe forms of abuse. Once our communities began returning to a more normal routine, CACs saw significant increases in their caseloads (at times creating a backlog) that they are still working through.

Children’s Advocacy Centers are community-based public-private partnerships that emphasize the coordination of child abuse investigations and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team. Although they receive public funds, CACs are primarily private, non-profit, 501(c) 3 organizations that are largely funded through private donations. A recent cost-benefit analysis estimates that child abuse investigations using CACs can save as much as $1,000/child, meaning last year, CACs saved more than $370 million nationwide.

The primary mission of a CAC is to prevent further victimization by ensuring that investigations are comprehensive and meet the age appropriate needs of the child. Communities that use CACs and multidisciplinary teams have a 94% conviction rate for CAC cases that are carried forward, and child victims of sexual abuse are four times more likely to receive forensic medical exams and increased referrals for mental health treatment than children served by non-CAC communities. Children’s Advocacy Centers can be found in every type of community from urban, suburban, and rural communities to Native American tribes. CACs provide services to children from birth to age 18, with nearly 40% of the children served being younger than 6 years old. As important as intervention is to alleviate the suffering of these children, efforts to prevent child sexual abuse in the first place is equally important. Last year, CACs provided child sexual abuse prevention training to millions of individuals, many in a school setting.

We again thank the subcommittee for consistently funding programs established by the Victims of Child Abuse Act. We are confident that funding programs at $50 million in FY24 will reflect increased community needs, allow CACs and our their MDT partners to continue serving child abuse victims nationwide, and provide opportunities for children to begin healing and move forward with their lives.

Thank you for your leadership in this critical area and for your consideration of this request.