

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Child and Family Services
11 State House Station
2 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Tel.: (207) 624-7900; Toll Free: (877) 680-5866
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay); Fax: (207) 287-5282

January 23, 2024

Senator Anne Carney, Chair
Representative Matthew Moonen, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 2084, *An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to submit information neither for nor against LD 2084, *An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*.

This bill would allocate \$6,000,000 for crime victim services in State Fiscal Year 2024-25.

The Violence Prevention Program (VPP) within the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) is responsible for administering several federal grants that fund contracts and MOUs for statewide violence prevention programming. By far the largest of these grants is the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA is funded by the Crime Victims Fund established by the Victims of Crime Act in 1984. The funding comes from fines and penalties paid by those convicted of federal crimes and not federal tax dollars, as a result the funding can vary greatly depending on the year and the amount of money coming into the Crime Victims Fund.

Maine received a VOCA award of \$13,885,282 at its peak in 2018. In 2021 the award was \$4,610,705. All states are facing these same cuts to VOCA funding. In 2023, Maine's award was \$5.9 million. The federal Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) predicts that states may see a 41% reduction in their VOCA allocation for federal fiscal year 2024 when compared to 2023. This was shared with Maine by OVC Director Rose at the August 2023 Annual VOCA Conference, and has remained their consistent projection. That would equate to an award of \$3.5 million for Maine, but the exact amount won't be known until February of this year.

Some amount of VOCA funding is contained in every contract and MOU administered by VPP. This includes funding to the following entities:

- Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
- Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Immigrant Resource Center of Maine
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance
- Legal Services for the Elderly
- Elder Abuse Institute of Maine
- The Victim Witness Advocates housed in the offices of Maine's District Attorneys

- 2 MOUs for services offered by the Office of the Attorney General
- An MOU with the Maine Judicial Branch
- An MOU with the Department of Corrections

Services funded by VOCA include community-based domestic violence and sexual assault services, civil legal representation for victims, government-based victim witness advocates, the Court Appointed Special Advocates program for children, gender-based violence services for immigrants and refugee and asylum seekers, and housing and supportive services for elder abuse victims. VPP estimates that across all providers and services VOCA funding contributes to services for approximately 50,000 victims per year.

Despite cuts to VOCA funding since its peak in 2018, VPP has been able to avoid cuts and significant decreases in victim's services in 2019 through 2024 by using unspent VOCA funding from previous years. However, given the anticipated decrease in federal funding, VPP will be unable to avoid funding cuts to the contracts beginning 10/1/24. Currently VPP's plan is utilize a forthcoming Request for Information (RFI) to give interested parties the opportunity to assist VPP with determining the current landscape and needs around victim's services in Maine.

On policy, the Department is reticent to support ongoing state funds to supplant what has been a federally supported program. As is clearly evident from the past five years, the federal Crime Victims Fund may go up as well as down in future years so it would be inappropriate to assume a fixed, ongoing amount of state funding. Moreover, the federal government sets the cap on the funding that can be released for VOCA and could change it for reasons unrelated to collections. The state cannot be responsible for shortfalls in federal commitments and is concerned about the message a permanent state backfill sends to those who should be mindful of the on-the-ground impact of cuts like those anticipated.

Advocates and providers have requested inclusion of funding for these services in the Governor's Supplemental Budget proposal. This request is under consideration, as the Administration appreciates the importance of these services.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this background information on this funding and the Department's plans going forward based on the reduced VOCA award. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

Bobbi h. Johnson, LMSW

Bobbi Johnson, LMSW
Director
Office of Child and Family Services
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

