



April 21, 2021

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
SD-224
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Durbin:

On behalf of the Daughters of Penelope (DOP), a preeminent international organization for women of Hellenic heritage and Philhellenes that sponsors and supports domestic violence shelters throughout the United States, and with **eight** Illinois chapters, I write to commend your sponsorship of **S.611, VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021** ("VOCA Fix"). We are pleased to see significant bipartisan support for the bill, including Ranking Member Chuck Grassley and eight other Senate Judiciary Committee colleagues. The Daughters of Penelope strongly supports the legislation.

As you are aware, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is the largest source of federal funding for domestic and sexual assault services in the country and is not taxpayer funded. Millions of victims rely on VOCA funds to access lifesaving services including shelter, housing, legal assistance, counseling, and more. VOCA funds come from federal criminal fines and fees that are deposited in the Crime Victims Fund (CVF). Over the course of the last decade, the Department of Justice has brought fewer federal criminal cases and has instead entered into deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements. The monetary penalties from these agreements are deposited into the General Treasury rather than into the CVF, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars.

- This has resulted in catastrophic cuts to VOCA. Grants have decreased by 70% over the last four years.

Chairman Durbin, your legislation correctly addresses this crisis by redirecting fines and penalties from non-prosecution and deferred prosecution agreements into the CVF, thereby reducing additional catastrophic cuts to VOCA and at no added taxpayer burden. We also applaud that the legislation gives states the ability to waive matching requirements for VOCA assistance grants.

For the Daughters of Penelope, there is strong interest in the legislation's enactment because of the vital assistance VOCA grants, via the CVF, provide to **Penelope House Domestic Violence Center**, Mobile, Alabama, which DOP members helped to found. Penelope House was the first domestic violence shelter established in Alabama in 1979, and it has been recognized by the Department of Justice for its excellence.

- VOCA is the largest source of Penelope House's funding.
- VOCA funds support **Penelope House's Court Advocacy Program** and largely responsible for **Penelope House's Emergency Shelter Program**, which shelters more than 500 survivors every year.
- VOCA grant funding has become increasingly important to Penelope House because Penelope House services four counties in Alabama.
- VOCA supports the salaries and benefits for **seven Court/Victim Advocates** who provide services to victims of domestic violence throughout Mobile, Washington, Clarke and Choctaw Counties of Alabama as they navigate within the court system.

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Our organization also is proud to sponsor and support a second domestic violence shelter, **Penelope's Place**, in Brockton, Massachusetts. Moreover, many of our 250-plus chapters support their local domestic violence centers. VOCA funds are essential to all these shelters.

Therefore, we applaud you for taking the lead to stand with survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault by addressing the important need to "fix VOCA" to restore funding for critical supportive services. We look forward to working with you to raise awareness of the legislation during the 117th Congress.

Respectfully submitted,

Celia Kachmarski
President