

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs (OJP) distributes approximately \$54 million annually in state and federal funds to programs across Minnesota providing services to crime victims. The Minnesota OJP has informed all current grantees, including WRAP (Women's Rural Advocacy Programs), that all states are receiving VOCA reductions. This is happening when crime victims need it most. VOCA was created by Congress in 1984 and established the Crime Victims Fund (CVF). The CVF is not funded by tax dollars. Instead, it comes from fines and fees from federal crime convictions. From there, Congress distributes the funding from CVF and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) based on a population-based formula to all states and territories.

VOCA is the biggest funder for WRAP and other similar agencies. This cut will equal an approximate 25% cut to WRAP's base VOCA funding. This is the worst time to be reducing services due to the impact of COVID-19 and an increase in the demand for services. Violence has drastically increased during the pandemic, and social distancing and isolation increased the risk of violence. As a result, WRAP has experienced the highest caseload we have had in agency history over the last three quarters. Our statistics show 180 clients in the third quarter (4/1/2022-6/30/2022) and again in the fourth quarter (7/1/2022-9/30/2022) of the fiscal year 2022 and 192 served in the first quarter (10/1/2022-12/31/2022) of the fiscal year 2023. In the fiscal year of 2022 (10/1/2021-9/30/2022), WRAP served 587 individuals. There is an increasing need for the services that WRAP provides. The services that WRAP provides are crucial. By decreasing this funding WRAP will lose the ability to support victims/survivors in the ways we do now, including emergency shelter, various types of advocacy (Medical, legal, systematic, etc.), crisis interventions, emergency financial assistance, victim notifications, and many other services.

The passage of the VOCA Fix Act of 2021 was an attempt to increase funding and succeeded in raising funding for the fiscal year of 2022, compared to the fiscal year of 2021. However, the CVF balance is not anticipated to recover from the lack of funding for another 2-3 years. Minnesota's legislature is attempting to elevate the burden by proposing a Direct Assistance to Crime Victim Survivors Bill, that would increase base funding by \$25 million. However, this will only be applied to the fiscal years 2024 and 2025. This bill will not be able to alleviate the funding issues for the fiscal year 2023.

This bill is very important. Decreasing funds to crime victim service providers will leave crime victims with fewer resources. It is important to understand the impact that a decrease in funding will have on not only crime victims, but the community as well. Crimes such as domestic violence cause a ripple effect. Domestic violence does not only impact the victim, but their family and friends, the community, and the system as a whole.

To understand what WRAP does, we have decided to share a story of a woman who had a smile that would light up any room, and who faced domestic abuse. Please note this story was shared with the permission and assistance of Ariel's family.

Ariel Christine Sakry, 25, was raised in Clarkfield, MN. On April 29th, 2022, Ariel was shot and killed by her husband, Isaac Malone, 25, in their Compton Township home. Isaac then shot and killed himself. Ariel was shot by her husband in the back of her head several times as she fell to the floor. She died from multiple gunshot wounds. Her husband, Isaac Malone had a prior charge of domestic violence by strangulation against Ariel in 2020. All of the charges were dropped because Isaac was a hunter, and he wanted his guns back. Isaac convinced Ariel to speak with the county attorney to persuade the attorney that she did not want him charged with domestic violence. Unfortunately, all charges were dropped, and his family then gave him back all of his firearms. Ariel was the mother of two young children. Ariel was not only a mother but a loving daughter and sister. Ariel was known for enjoying simple things. Ariel was very helpful, caring, loving, grateful, and full of life. Her death not only impacted her family and friends but her community.

Following the death of Ariel, her family members and friends have become strong advocates against domestic violence. They attended domestic violence awareness events and even spoke at the Capitol with WRAP staff as to why this funding bill is so important. Her family feels they are now her voice, to speak out about domestic violence.

WRAP would like to encourage everyone to write to their legislatures asking them to support this bill. It may help to include the file number for your legislature's ease. House File #1437 Senate File #1475

A copy of the MN Legislature bill to increase funding can be found at: https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?session=ls93&version=latest&number=HF1437&session_number=0&ession_year=2023