

# The Elder Justice Coalition

A National Advocacy Voice for Elder Justice in America  
John B. Breaux, Honorary Chair • Robert B. Blancato, National Coordinator

November 12, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee;  
Vice Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related  
Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related  
Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski:

On behalf of the 3000 member bipartisan Elder Justice Coalition, we write to urge you to provide a release in the FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations omnibus bill to permit the continuation of the high FY 2015 disbursement levels from the Crime Victims Fund.

The Crime Victims Fund, also called the VOCA Fund, was created by the bipartisan Victims of Crime Act of 1984 as a mechanism to fund compensation and services for the nation's victims of crime through fines and penalties on federal criminal offenders. The importance of victim response has never been clearer. Releasing higher levels of VOCA funding is allowing jurisdictions to plan holistically to reach and serve all victims of crime, including victims of elder abuse, and to engage new community partners in this effort, such as Adult Protective Services.

The problem of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation is growing while the federal response to it is not. Today, it is estimated that one out of every ten persons over the age of 60 is a victim of elder abuse. Furthermore, victims of elder financial abuse lose almost \$3 billion each year, including entire life savings. This new VOCA funding has allowed states to begin to reach these victims. Without a continuation of this funding, these victims will once more be left to fend for themselves.

Congress did the right thing when it set the FY 2015 VOCA disbursement at a level approximately equal to the amount deposited into the fund from criminal fines and penalties collected in the previous year. That release of \$2.36 billion gave relief to longstanding funding pressure that had severely constrained the ability of providers to meet the needs of all the nation's crime victims.

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For more than a decade, states struggled to simply maintain funding for their longstanding VOCA grantees to provide a basic response to victims of violent crime. Even at those agencies, staffing levels continued to shrink each year, staff training was repeatedly cut, and waiting lists for services grew. States were unable to focus on newly recognized victim populations, including elder victims of abuse and financial exploitation.

With the increased release of VOCA funds in FY 2015, states began taking very thoughtful, responsible approaches to use this funding effectively, engaging in needs assessments and strategic planning with stakeholders, setting training frameworks to ensure that services are high quality, and working to improve data collection and outcome measurement—activities that will increase the capacity of all providers to reach and serve victims. Many states have taken immediate steps to improve services while those longer term planning activities are underway. However, the uncertainty created by the prospect of a major cut in VOCA is putting much of that on hold.

By setting a funding level in line with collections in FY 2015, Congress provided a clear path for wholesale improvement of our national crime victim response system, particularly improving the lives of victims of elder abuse. We urge you to permit this progress to continue by providing a release for FY 2016 that makes it possible to maintain this level of disbursement, fulfilling the promise of the Victims of Crime Act.

Sincerely,



Robert B. Blancato  
National Coordinator  
Elder Justice Coalition

cc: Rep. Hal Rogers  
Rep. Nita Lowey  
Rep. John Culberson  
Rep. Chaka Fattah