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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2024

AG Kaul Leads Bipartisan Group of 42 AGs Urging Congress to Stabilize Funding to Support Victims of Crime

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul is leading a bipartisan coalition of 42 attorneys general in urging the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to authorize much-needed 2024 bridge funding for the federal Crime Victims Fund (the “VOCA Fund”). The VOCA Fund supports the provision of essential direct services for crime victims and survivors across the country. According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crime, projected fiscal year 2024 funding for victim service grants will be \$700 million lower than fiscal year 2023.

“Victim service programs are an essential part of an effective criminal justice system. They ensure that support is available for crime victims, and their work helps to hold offenders accountable,” said AG Kaul. “In order to avoid severe cutbacks to victim services, Congress must act to address the shortfall in VOCA funding.”

The VOCA Fund was established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, and it is the primary financial source for victim services in all 50 states, five U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. VOCA Fund revenue is collected from offenders convicted of crimes, not from taxes.

In 2021, Congress passed the VOCA Fix Act, which allows monetary recoveries from federal deferred prosecutions and non-prosecution agreements to replenish the fund. While passage of the VOCA Fix Act was necessary, it was not sufficient to adequately shore up fund balances, and 2024 VOCA funding for crime victim service programs is anticipated to be 41% lower nationwide when compared to 2023 grant awards.

Without prompt action by Congress, many victim service programs across the country may be forced to close.

The VOCA Fund supports medical care, mental health counseling, lost wages, courtroom advocacy and temporary housing for victims and survivors of crime. It also helps to fund federal, state and tribal victim service programs; crime victim compensation; discretionary grant awards; victim specialists in U.S. Attorney's Offices and the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the federal victim notification system.

The Wisconsin Department of Justice, through its Office of Crime Victim Services, administers victim assistance grant programs financed by the VOCA Fund. Since 2019, VOCA awards of approximately \$44.5 million annually have been administered across the state to sustain adequate and responsive victim service programming in both rural and urban Wisconsin communities.

These services support the immediate and ongoing needs of a wide range of crime victims and survivors, regardless of their engagement with the criminal justice system. Specific services supported by VOCA include, but are not limited to, forensic interviews and age-appropriate supports for child victims of abuse; emergency safety planning and shelter services for individuals experiencing domestic abuse; legal assistance for crime victims navigating their rights within the criminal justice process; and counseling and support groups to address the mental health and healing of survivors.

These funds aim to support the diverse needs of survivors while fostering a comprehensive and survivor-centered network of advocacy.

Joining Attorney General Kaul in the letter are the attorneys general of Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Northern Mariana Islands, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Virgin Islands, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming.

A copy of the letter can be found on the WI DOJ website.