



To the Minnesota Legislature:

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, write to express our support for an increase in state funding to Crime Victims' Services (CVS). CVS advocates are critical to Minnesota's public safety infrastructure, not only contributing to the safety and security of our communities, but also contributing to the restoration of economic health and emotional wellness for people and their families who have been impacted by violence and crime.

CVS advocates contribute to the public safety ecosystem in varied ways. They run physical infrastructures like Domestic Violence Shelters, Sexual Assault Response Centers, Child Advocacy Centers, and Supervised Visitation Centers. They provide services like legal advocacy and legal systems navigation, mental and behavioral health support, and assistance with economic benefits. They are a crucial part of many survivors' safety and healing journeys, and their sole mandate is to support and respect the lives of those who are impacted by violence and crime.

CVS advocates do more than simply provide vital public safety infrastructure. They also help to provide direct economic aid to people who need it, and help victims/survivors navigate employment opportunities. By helping crime victims establish economic security and independence, CVS advocates not only interrupt the cycle of violence, but they also interrupt the cycle of poverty. The goal is a dignified life for all people, no matter what they have experienced. When individuals, families, and communities who have been harmed by crime and violence are able to overcome barriers around housing, personal finance, and safety, everyone wins.

CVS advocates help more than just victims/survivors. Often, victims and survivors of crime have entire families in need of advocacy, safety, and respect. CVS advocates help with that. Many CVS advocates used to be clients of a CVS program. When survivors experience support, they often are inspired to start a career as an advocate supporting other survivors. This leads to a cascade of survivors helping and creating careers for other survivors.

Federal investment in CVS providers has collapsed since 2017. The amount of federal money being provided to CVS providers was lower in Fiscal Year 2023 than in Fiscal Year 2015, and investment has continued dropping. Demand for advocacy services has only risen since the pandemic. At one Domestic Violence Shelter, the turnaway rate for otherwise eligible clients is 78% due primarily to a lack of available beds. These programs are unable to provide any more services at their current level of resources, even as those services are desperately needed.

Programs are experiencing hiring freezes, wage freezes, reductions in benefits, and the loss of staff due to funding shortages. We cannot fail to invest in these services - and in survivors.

Our state can do far more to support crime victims, and ensuring programs can pay their advocates a thriving wage is the first step. Please commit to a robust and long-term investment in Crime Victims' Services, and affirm that Crime Victims' Services *are* a critical piece of Minnesota's public safety infrastructure.

Sincerely,

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