



Pennsylvania
**Commission on Crime
and Delinquency**

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Toolkit

Updated July 2025



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If you have any questions about the information contained in this toolkit, please reach out to Kathy Buckley, Director of the Office of Victims’ Services at PCCD, at kabuckley@pa.gov.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) 101

What is VOCA?

The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), passed into law in 1984, established the Crime Victims Fund to create a permanent source of support for services that help crime victims across the United States. VOCA is the largest source of federal funding supporting victim service organizations and helping survivors of crime find safety, healing, and justice. Pennsylvania victim service organizations provide critical life-saving services to over 146,000 victims annually.

VOCA also partially funds states' victim compensation programs to alleviate the financial burdens of crime victimization. Pennsylvania's Victims Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP) can directly reimburse crime victimization expenses such as medical, counseling, funeral, and relocation expenses. On average, VCAP pays over \$14M in victimization-related expenses.

How does VOCA help victims?

VOCA funding is distributed to states through grants and is then passed through to local victim services agencies. These agencies use VOCA funding to provide:

- Crisis Intervention & Emergency Services: 24/7 crisis hotlines, emergency shelter or housing, safety planning for victims of domestic violence, emergency transportation, and medical/mental health assistance.
- Counseling & Support: Individual and group therapy, peer support groups, and trauma-informed care.
- Advocacy & Legal Support: Assistance navigating the criminal justice system, including court accompaniment and advocacy, help with filing protection or restraining orders, and other supports.
- Information & Referral Services: Information about victims' rights and available services, and referrals to other community resources (housing, healthcare, employment, etc.)

Where does the money come from?

VOCA is unique because it is funded through fines and penalties paid by people who commit federal crimes, rather than being funded through taxpayer dollars. These fines and penalties are deposited into the Crime Victims Fund, and a portion of available dollars is used to support VOCA grants to states, including Pennsylvania.

What is the current state of VOCA funding?

After years of declining deposits, the balance in the Crime Victims Fund is critically low. Funding has dropped by almost \$700 million, resulting in a 45% decrease in victim services funding since FY 2022.

Congress passed [VOCA "Fix" legislation in 2021](#) to help address this issue, but more action is needed. As an additional measure, [federal legislation has been introduced](#) to direct funding from the federal False Claims Act to help bolster the Crime Victims Fund. Some states have also taken steps to fill in the gap through emergency appropriations or other funding mechanisms to help offset federal funding cuts.

Still, victim service providers in communities across the country are cutting services or closing entirely, leaving millions of victims without access to support and services. Last year, Pennsylvania adopted a modest 5% reduction in VOCA awards to local programs in response to these funding reductions and expects more severe cuts if the situation is not addressed.

How can you help?

If VOCA funding continues to decline, victim service programs in Pennsylvania will be forced to reduce or eliminate services, lay off staff, or shut down entirely— leaving fewer people with the ability to access critical, life-saving support in the aftermath of a crime.

We encourage you to reach out to your legislators in the U.S. Congress to increase awareness of the current VOCA crisis.

Real-Life Stories of VOCA's Impact

Below are examples of scenarios showing the importance of VOCA-funded services. Please insert your own scenarios based on the population your organization serves.

A local VOCA-funded agency has been supporting an older adult who experienced years of physical, emotional, and financial abuse by her own daughter. Advocates helped her obtain a Protection From Abuse order and supported the prosecution and conviction of the perpetrator. To help her live safely and independently, the agency coordinated home health care, meal delivery, and safety improvements to her home.

They also worked with her to protect her finances and coordinated with the District Attorney's Office to prepare a safety plan for when her daughter is released from incarceration. Ongoing support includes medical follow-up, emotional care, and strong community-based services, ensuring this survivor can remain safely in her home and avoid revictimization.

VOCA funding makes this kind of long-term, wraparound support possible—especially for older adults who often face abuse behind closed doors with limited resources.

One night, a local domestic violence center received a call from police after a woman was brutally attacked, strangled, and shot at by her boyfriend. A victim advocate immediately responded in person to the hospital, providing safety planning and critical resources. Because the abuser hadn't yet been located, the advocate coordinated with law enforcement to ensure the victim's family was safe and placed the survivor in emergency shelter.

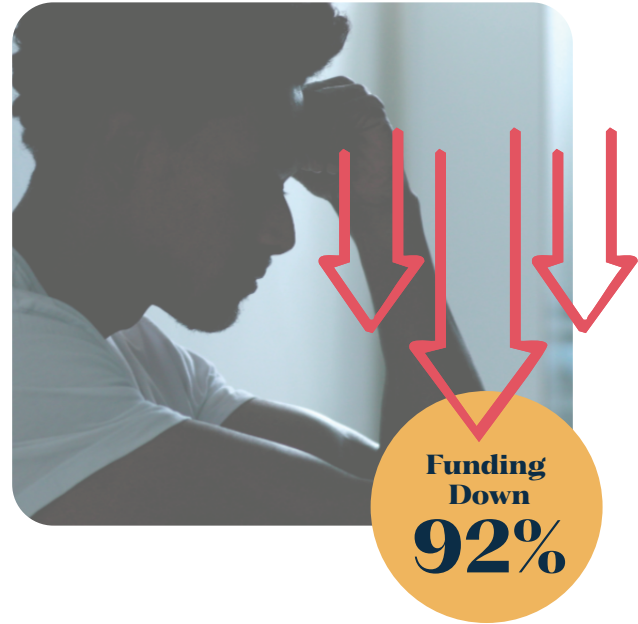
With her phone destroyed and her apartment no longer safe, the advocate helped her obtain basic necessities such as clothing, toiletries, food, and supported her in filing a protection order. When the abuser was arrested, the advocate accompanied her to court and continued to support her recovery. Since she had to leave her job (which she shared with the abuser), VOCA funding made it possible to provide emergency financial assistance. Counseling services were also arranged to help her cope with the trauma.

VOCA funding makes this comprehensive response possible—crisis intervention, legal advocacy, shelter, financial support, and trauma recovery—all working together to help a survivor stay safe and rebuild.



The Impact of Federal VOCA Funding Reductions on Pennsylvania's Victim Service Providers

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is the largest federal funding source for victim service providers (VSPs) supporting victims of crime and ensuring they have access to services to aid in their recovery.



Since 2017, the VOCA fund has declined by 92% from \$13 billion in 2017 to only \$1 billion in 2023

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) is the state agency responsible for supporting Pennsylvania's victims of crime through the allocation of federal VOCA funds to VSPs. Recently, PCCD surveyed 127 VSPs to understand how their organizations have been impacted by VOCA funding reductions. Below are the findings shared by VSPs whom broadly express concerns with the challenges they presently face in supporting/retaining their staff and effectively delivering important services to victims of crime in their communities.

01. Staff Burnout

Over half (54%) of VSPs stated their staff is experiencing burnout. This may be partially explained by 74% of VSPs stating staff workloads have increased to try to maintain consistent service delivery to victims of crime. Burnout is most elevated among VSPs serving, on average, 100-500 victims per month — 73% of these VSPs report staff burnout.



02. Staff Turnover

High staff turnover is reported by 31% of VSPs, and is likely connected to staff burnout and increased workload. 64% of VSPs now intentionally leave staff positions vacant or experience extended vacancies due to difficulty hiring (50% of all VSPs struggle to hire qualified candidates), funding limitations, or uncertainty around future funding.



03. Low Staff Wages

Another item likely contributing to staff turnover is low staff wages and benefits (if provided at all). 3 of 4 (74%) VSPs view this as their single greatest staff challenge. 3 of 5 (59.8%) VSPs state the low wages and/or lack of benefits causes difficulties in recruiting qualified staff to assist in maintaining consistent victim service delivery.



04. Battling to Meet Needs

VSPs are battling to fully meet the needs of victims following funding reductions. However, 3 of 4 (75%) VSPs are unable to fully meet the needs of their victims. Worse yet, future funding reductions loom and 94% of all VSPs believe additional reductions will negatively impact their organization's ability to fully meet the needs of victims.

**3 in 4
Programs
Can't Meet
Victim Needs**

05. The Reality of VOCA Cuts

VSPs describe the impact of reductions on their organizations

- Emergency housing support eliminated for victims of sexual abuse and trafficking.
- Civil legal programs cut, leaving DV survivors without vital representation.
- Staffing slashed by up to 33%, forcing positions to go part-time or unfilled.
- Housing assistance and therapy hours reduced, limiting victim recovery resources.
- Crisis response and trauma counseling scaled back, even as crime rates rise.

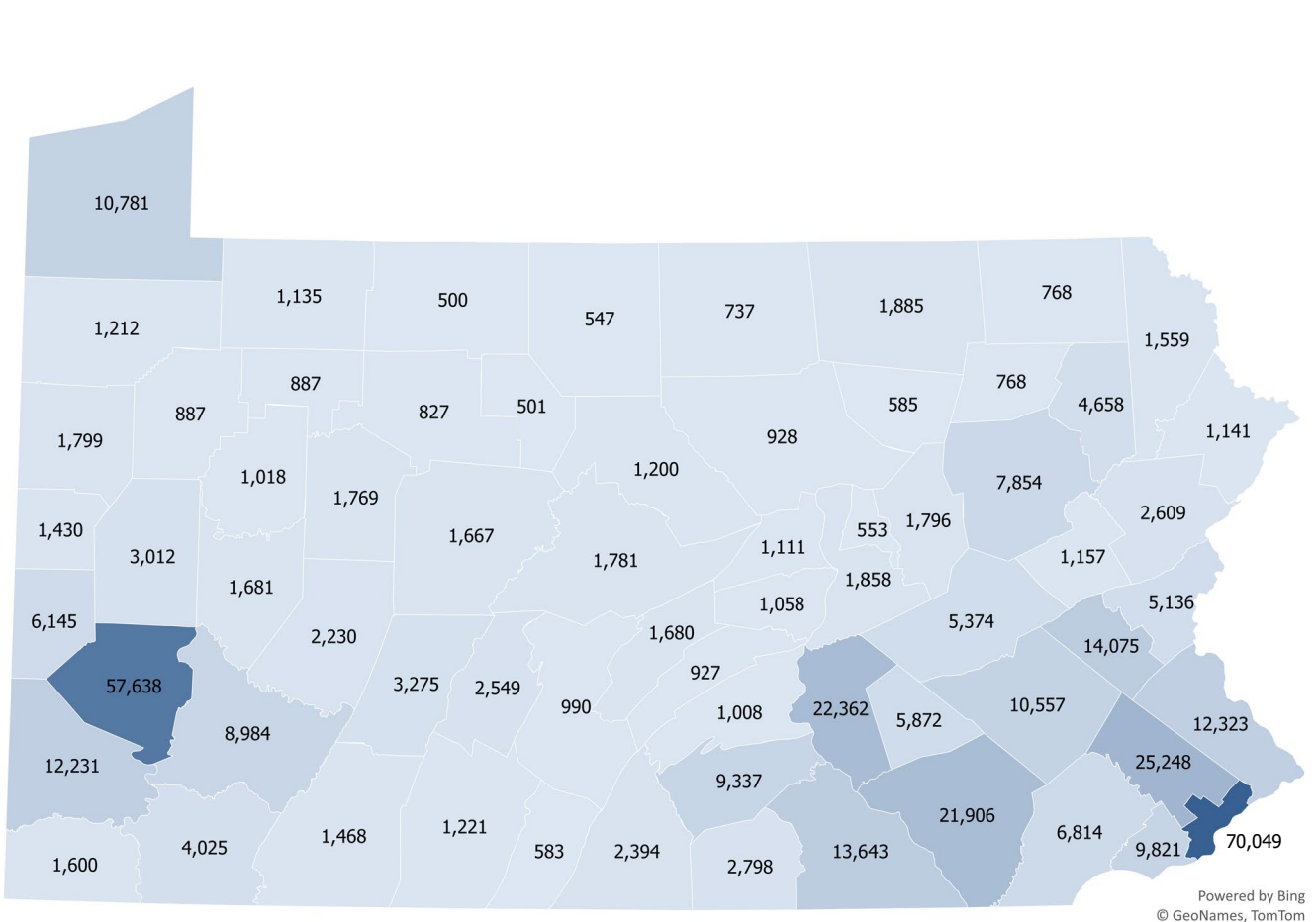
Authored by
Robert Orth, Ph.D. & Angel Alcantara
PCCD Office of Research, July 2025



Victims Served with VOCA Funding by Local Programs (2021-2024)

The map below reflects the number of *new* victims served by VOCA-funded agencies from 2021-2024. It is important to note that these numbers **do not** reflect the number of times that a single survivor came in for separate services on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis for things such as counseling, support groups, court hearings, etc.

These numbers can be used to help paint a picture of the number of people served, at least once, through VOCA funding across Pennsylvania.



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VOCA Educational Phone Script

Find your [U.S. Senator](#) and/or [U.S. House Representative](#)

When connected to a staffer or voicemail.

"Good morning/afternoon. My name is [Your Name], and I'm reaching out today as someone who works directly with victims of crime in our community to share information about the federal Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA. We are aware that there are many important decisions on the horizon for the federal government, especially related to the expenditure and allocation of funding. As you are involved in that decision-making process, I wanted to inform you of the good work that is happening related to the provision of services to victims, which is made possible through VOCA.

At [name your organization], we provide essential support such as crisis counseling, emergency shelter, legal advocacy, and trauma-informed care to individuals affected by [insert the victimizations your organization serves] in our area. In the past year, we have served [X number] victims in [town, county, or community]. VOCA funding plays a crucial role in enabling us to deliver these services.

However, recent declines in VOCA funding have posed significant challenges for our organization, including [briefly describe impacts, e.g., reductions in staff or services]. These changes directly affect the level of assistance available to your constituents who rely on us for services.

I am providing this context to help better inform you as you debate increasing the VOCA cap and consider legislation like the Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act, which would transfer residual funds collected through the False Claims Act. These actions would support local victim service providers like us. Sustained and stable funding through VOCA helps ensure that organizations like ours can continue to provide critical, life-saving support to victims and survivors without interruption.

If appropriate, I would be happy to coordinate a visit for [Senator/Representative Last Name] and staff to [Your Organization] to offer a firsthand view of how these programs operate and the role VOCA plays in supporting our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration."

VOCA Educational Email Template

Find your [U.S. Senator](#) and/or [U.S. House Representative](#)

Subject: Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Funding

Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I'm reaching out today as someone who works directly with victims of crime in our community to share information about the federal Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA. We are aware that there are many important decisions on the horizon for the federal government, especially related to the expenditure and allocation of funding. As you are involved in that decision-making process, I wanted to inform you of the good work that is happening related to the provision of services to victims, which is made possible through VOCA.

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If appropriate, I would be happy to coordinate a visit for [Senator/Representative Last Name] and staff to [Your Organization] to offer a firsthand view of how these programs operate and the role VOCA plays in supporting our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Title]

[Your Organization]

[Your Email Address]

[Your Phone Number]