

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your leadership with the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* to address the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we prepare a third stimulus package to mitigate the vast impact of this crisis and stabilize our economy, we write to recognize the impact of the crisis on survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Research shows that public crises significantly increase the rate of domestic and sexual violence and that unemployment is a risk factor for domestic and sexual violence. Many survivors were housing insecure and were facing financial hardship before the COVID-19 pandemic and are working in the service industry or in low-wage jobs. Losing their jobs means either returning to abusive relationships or seeking victim services and housing assistance that they previously did not need. They may also find more urgency in leaving abusive relationships and seeking assistance if they are quarantined with an abuser.

Domestic violence and sexual assault programs are already unable to meet the needs of survivors. During economic crises, when the demand for services increases substantially, donations decrease, leaving programs unable to cope. This is exacerbated by the need to practice social distancing, which is causing programs to change how they deliver services. Domestic violence shelter capacity is shrinking due to the need to keep shelter residents from being in close contact with non-family members. Many shelters do not have the resources to provide hotel and motel accommodations, and as the need increases and shelter capacity decreases, the need for alternative accommodations likewise increases.

In order to serve survivors both in the immediate term and to help them regain stability and independence in the long-term, programs need access to flexible funding sources to enable them to address survivors' needs. In the short term, this includes increases in the following funding streams:

- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Sexual Assault Service Program (SASP) by at least \$100 million;
- Family Violence Prevention and Services Act by at least \$100 million;
- VAWA transitional housing by \$40 million;

- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus funds by \$100 million;
- HUD Emergency Solutions Grants and Disaster Housing Assistance programs and require distribution to domestic violence and sexual assault organizations;
- VAWA housing vouchers at HUD by \$20 million;
- The National Domestic Violence Hotline by \$2 million; and
- VAWA STOP grants by \$100 million.

To ensure that the needs of particularly vulnerable communities are addressed, the following grant programs should be increased, and tribal set-asides in these and other grant programs should be directly given to Tribes:

- VAWA Culturally Specific Services for Victims grant program and Outreach and Services to Underserved Populations grants by \$20 million;
- VAWA Training and Services to End Violence Against Women with Disabilities to provide victim services by \$10 million;
- VAWA Training and Services to End Abuse in Later Life to provide victim services by \$10 million.

To meet both the immediate and longer-term needs of survivors, it is critical to increase deposits into the dwindling Crime Victims Fund to meet both the immediate needs of survivors and to deal with the lingering aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also means providing paid safe leave for survivors and access to unemployment insurance if they must leave their jobs due to domestic or sexual violence.

We appreciate your strong leadership and persistence in fighting for the rights and safety of survivors. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier

Debbie Dingell

Gwen Moore

Ann McLane Kuster

Brian Fitzpatrick

Brian Fitzpatrick

Judy Chu
Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Peter A. DeFazio
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Jerry McNerney
Grace F. Napolitano
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Joaquin Castro
Ayanna Pressley
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