

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 9, 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 *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to address the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we prepare a fourth package to mitigate the vast impact of this crisis and stabilize our economy, we write to recognize the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence.

We appreciate that the CARES Act provided \$45 million for the Family Violence Prevention Services Act and \$2 million for the National Domestic Violence Hotline to address the increased demand for domestic violence supportive services. However, we are deeply concerned that these funds are insufficient, and that *no* funding was provided to address the needs of sexual assault survivors.

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. Survivors of sexual assault are experiencing not only increased stress but a decreased ability to engage in recovery activities. Survivors who already face multiple systemic barriers in accessing help, such as accommodation for disabilities, limited English proficiency, and ineligibility due to immigration status face yet more hurdles in escaping and overcoming sexual assault and domestic violence.

Domestic violence and sexual assault programs are already unable to meet the needs of all survivors. During economic crises, when the demand for services increases substantially, donations decrease, leaving programs with not enough staff to meet the needs of survivors. 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.

Before this crisis, rape crisis centers were already struggling to meet the needs of survivors with 84 percent experiencing an increased demand for services and half with a waiting list for counseling services. While many programs lack a trauma therapist on staff, rape crisis centers are now scrambling to transition to remote services. Many advocates do not even have a mobile work phone yet they are dedicated to ensuring all survivors have their needs met.

In addition, before the COVID-19 pandemic, victim services organizations working in culturally specific communities were already stretched thin helping survivors navigate complicated systems to obtain help. As a result of stay at home orders, these advocates working with victims face additional hurdles, especially to access services and programs that are now only being provided remotely, or paused for the duration of the pandemic. Advocates are struggling to assist victims obtaining interpretation or translation to obtain protective orders or complete applications for assistance. Emergency funding will help address these needs.

Furthermore, these advocates are working to help many immigrant victims, in particular, who may be ineligible for basic services such as COVID-19 screening and care, access to stimulus checks, or unemployment insurance. Clarifying that COVID-19 screening and care are covered by emergency Medicaid funding, and clarifying that all taxpayers are eligible for stimulus payments will help reduce barriers that immigrant survivors face in escaping and recovering from sexual and domestic violence.

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 \$55 million;
- VAWA STOP formula grants to states to provide victim services to address the needs of victims with disabilities, elderly survivors, those in rural areas and in need of housing and legal assistance and those in the family court system and with child custody and visitation needs by \$200 million;
- VAWA Culturally Specific Services for Victims grant program and Outreach and Services to Underserved Populations grants by \$20 million each;
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care Domestic Violence Bonus funds by \$100 million;

To ensure that the needs of particularly vulnerable communities are addressed, tribal set-asides should be directly given to Tribes. To meet both the immediate and longer-term needs of survivors, it is critical to increase deposits into the dwindling Crime Victims Fund and eliminate matching fund requirements to meet both the immediate needs of survivors and to deal with the lingering aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the Recovery Rebate payments will provide much needed financial support for many survivors of both domestic and sexual assault. However, in the domestic violence context, survivors may be living in shelters or undisclosed locations, or living with an abusive partner who may control all the money. They may also have separated from abusive partners but filed taxes jointly for 2019 or, if they have not filed their 2019 taxes, in 2018. The stimulus check process must include a mechanism, to be developed in conjunction with the FVPSA office in the Administration for Children and Families and other relevant agencies, to ensure survivors receive their stimulus checks.

Finally, paid leave must be expanded to reflect the needs of survivors who often have to take time off to seek medical attention, victim services or attend to legal matters.

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

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Don Young

Adam Smith

Adriano Espaillat

Alan Lowenthal

Albio Sires

Alcee L. Hastings

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.

Ami Bera, M.D.

Andy Levin

Ann Kirkpatrick

Anna G. Eshoo

Anthony G. Brown

Ayanna Pressley

Barbara Lee

Bill Foster

Brenda L. Lawrence

Brendan F. Boyle

Carolyn B. Maloney

Chellie Pingree

Cheri Bustos

Chris Pappas

Cindy Axne

Colin Z. Allred

Daniel T. Kildee

Danny K. Davis

David B. McKinley, P.E.

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell

Denny Heck

Derek Kilmer

Dina Titus

Eddie Bernice Johnson

Eleanor Holmes Norton

Eliot L. Engel

Elissa Slotkin

Frederica S. Wilson

Gerald E. Connolly

Grace F Napolitano

Grace Meng

Harley Rouda

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.

J. Luis Correa

Jahana Hayes

James P. McGovern

Jason Crow

Jennifer Wexton

Jerry McNerney

Jesús G. "Chuy" García

Joaquin Castro

John B. Larson

John Yarmuth

Joseph P. Kennedy, III

Josh Gottheimer

Judy Chu

Julia Brownley

Katherine Clark

Kim Schrier, M.D.

Linda T. Sánchez

Lloyd Doggett

Lois Frankel

Lucy McBath

Marcia L. Fudge

Mark Pocan

Mark Takano

Mike Levin

Mike Quigley

Nanette Diaz Barragán

Norma Torres

Peter A. DeFazio

Peter Welch

Pramila Jayapal

Rashida Tlaib

Sean Casten

Sean Patrick Maloney

Sheila Jackson Lee

Steve Cohen

Suzanne Bonamici

Sylvia R. Garcia

Ted W. Lieu

Terri A. Sewell

Theodore E. Deutch

Thomas R. Suozzi

Tom O'Halleran

Tony Cárdenas

Veronica Escobar

Zoe Lofgren