Senator Richard Shelby, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Senator Roy Blunt, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Representative John Culberson, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Representative José Serrano, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science
Representative Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Representative Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

(DATE)

Dear Senators Shelby, Shaheen, Blunt, and Murray, and Representatives Culberson, Serrano, Cole, and DeLauro:

The National Taskforce to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF) is comprised of national, state, and local leadership organizations and individuals advocating on behalf of sexual assault and domestic violence victims and women’s rights. The undersigned organizations join with the NTF to urge you to significantly increase funding for federal programs that address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, and reject cuts to these critical programs. Domestic and sexual violence are life-threatening, pervasive crimes that affect millions of girls and boys, women and men all across this nation. The President’s FY 18 proposed budget blueprint calls for deep cuts across federal agencies, and these cuts have the potential to eliminate lifesaving services for survivors. Victims of these degrading and life-threatening crimes rely on federally-funded direct services such as shelter, rape crisis services, legal assistance, counseling, and more. Communities across the country rely on federal prevention funding to protect our young people. Federal funding underpins our nation’s improvements to the community-based response to domestic and sexual violence. We encourage you to invest in these vital programs.

Last year’s modest increases in funding for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), along with sustained funding released from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) are beginning to address a portion of the gap in direct services. However, funding for these cost-effective and essential programs must be increased. Investments in these programs must fulfill the promise of VAWA, FVPSA, and related federal laws by meeting the demand for services.

**VAWA, VOCA, and FVPSA are smart investments that have fueled our undeniable national progress in addressing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.**

Our nation has made such phenomenal progress in understanding and addressing sexual and domestic violence because we have made a **national, ongoing, annual investment.** Before the passage of VAWA, law enforcement did not arrest perpetrators, prosecutors didn't prosecute, and courts simply did not know what to do. With the passage of VAWA, the infusion of federal funds fostered unprecedented coordination between frontline stakeholders responding to domestic violence and sexual assault crises – police officers, victim service providers, prosecutors, judges, and the criminal and civil justice systems. VAWA has elevated a national learning community, fostering innovation and promoting best practices. Additionally,
federal VAWA funds encourage states to leverage local and state funds in the effort to end these pervasive crimes. VAWA's work is complemented by VOCA, which funds direct services to victims of all types of crime, including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, and by FVPSA, which is our nation's only dedicated funding source for domestic violence shelters and direct service organizations.

VAWA saved an estimated $12.6 billion in net-verted costs in its first six years alone. Through our nation's combined investments in VAWA, VOCA, and FVPSA, reporting of domestic violence has increased, the rate of non-fatal intimate partner violence against women has decreased by 63 percent and the number of women killed by an intimate partner has decreased by 23 percent. A 2010 study demonstrated that an increase in the number of legal services available is associated with a decrease in intimate partner homicide. Another study found that VAWA funds, particularly the ones supporting law enforcement, were associated with a reduction in rape and aggravated assault. A 2017 study shows the effectiveness of bystander intervention funded through VAWA's Rape Prevention and Education Program in reducing sexual assault perpetration. A 2008 study shows conclusively that the nation's domestic violence shelters, funded in significant part by FVPSA, are addressing victims' urgent and long-term needs and are helping victims protect themselves and their children. Additionally, recent increased funding released via VOCA has allowed communities to foster innovation, reduce waitlists, increase services, hire vital staff to help and counsel more survivors, and expand rural services.

Desperate need remains
Despite this progress, shelters, rape crisis centers, and other domestic and sexual violence service providers continue to face budget shortfalls. At the same time, the national spotlight on these crimes is bringing more survivors out of the shadows and increasing requests for prevention programs, which create an increased demand for services. Many programs are forced to turn away victims who are desperate and have nowhere to go.

Almost one in five women in the United States have been the victim of rape or attempted rape, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), yet a 2016 survey by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence shows that the nation's 1,300 sexual assault programs often lack sufficient resources to meet victims' most basic needs. Over half (53 percent) of rape crisis centers have a waitlist for counseling services, and almost 40 percent have a waitlist of a month or more for prevention programs. In 2016, almost a quarter of rape crisis centers saw an overall decrease in funds as well as a decrease in staffing - over 100 advocate positions were either laid off or left unfilled.

Over 12 million individuals experience domestic violence annually, according to the CDC. The National Domestic Violence Counts Census found that in just one day in September 2016, while more than 72,959 victims of domestic violence received services, 11,991 requests for services went unmet due to lack of funding and resources. Of those unmet requests, 66 percent were for safe housing. Also in 2016, domestic violence programs laid off approximately 1,200 staff positions. Most of the laid off positions were direct service staff, including counselors, advocates, and children's advocates. Given reduced funding and staff, local programs had to reduce or completely eliminate countless services, including emergency shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling.

The federal government funds critical programs at the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS) that reach into every community across the nation to provide safety, access to services, and justice for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The formula grant programs and national services include:

- The STOP program (VAWA, DOJ), which improves the criminal justice and wider community response by allowing states and communities to develop coordinated community responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- The Sexual Assault Services Program (VAWA, DOJ), which is the federal government’s only funding source dedicated to sexual assault services and funds rape crisis centers in every state;
- The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA, HHS), which is the federal government’s only dedicated funding stream for domestic violence shelters and outreach programs;
- The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA, DOJ), which is a non-taxpayer fund supporting over 4,000 victim services agencies across the nation to help victims deal with the immediate aftermath of a crime;
- The Rape Prevention and Education Program (RPE, HHS), which supports comprehensive sexual violence prevention in every state for communities and schools; and
• The National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) (HHS), which receives approximately half a million contacts per year, Stronghearts Native Helpline (Stronghearts), which serves the specific cultural and jurisdictional needs of native victims of domestic and dating violence, and Abused Deaf Women’s Advocacy Services (AD WAS), which is the only national services program for deaf and hearing-challenged survivors of domestic violence.

VAWA and related discretionary programs complement the state formula grants by propelling innovation and providing targeted responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. All the programs detailed in the attached chart work together to provide a comprehensive response to victims of violence. These include lifesaving legal services; funding for services in rural and remote areas; transitional housing programs to help victims rebuild their lives after violence and abuse; law enforcement improvements such as Sexual Assault Response Teams, initiatives to address the rape kit backlog, and homicide reduction initiatives; services for underserved victims including disabled and elderly victims; funding to ensure compliance with the requirement of serving victims with Limited English Proficiency; programs aimed at children, youth, and college students; projects addressing courts and visitation; programs to respond to the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence on tribal lands; projects addressing violence in the workplace; a national domestic violence hotline; and prevention programs and public health responses to violence and abuse.

Other federal programs, including funds to enforce Title IX at the Department of Education and support for Legal Services Corporation (LSC), are part of the critical social safety net for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) should receive enhanced funding to continue its work to bring about lasting change on campuses and in K-12, including holding schools accountable and making sure that student survivors receive counseling and other vital accommodations. Legal services are second only to medical services as the most-requested need of victims, and the provision of legal services significantly lowers the incidences of domestic violence. We reject proposed cuts to LSC, which help many survivors of violence access vital legal assistance in the aftermath of a crime. Each of these programs must receive sustained and increased funding to ensure that our communities can build on our years of progress and meet the needs of ALL victims.

Funding cuts would erode our nation’s progress on this critical issue. We support full funding for VAWA, FVPSA, and related programs, setting the VOCA cap at an average of the past three years’ deposits into the VOCA account, and creating a tribal funding stream in VOCA. We oppose transferring funds from VOCA to fund other programs.

We call on you to support increased funding for these vital programs. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Monica McLaughlin, National Network to End Domestic Violence at mmclaughlin@nnedv.org or Terri Poore, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence at terri@endsexualviolence.org.

Thank you for your continued leadership in keeping victims safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

(program list)

Cc: Full House and Senate Appropriations Committees

2 Intimate Partner Violence in the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Jan. 2008.