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Micaela Deming, Policy Director
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House Finance Committee
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Micaela Deming and I am the Policy Director and Staff Attorney of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) represents 75 local domestic violence organizations across the state. ODVN appreciates the opportunity to provide interested testimony regarding the needs of these survivors and the programs that serve them. We need an increase in the domestic violence services line item from \$1 million to \$5 million per year.

The need for emergency shelter and support services for Ohio families struggling with domestic violence is greater now than ever before. In the past five years, 23 children were killed by domestic violence abusers, and seven law enforcement officers died responding to domestic violence incidents. Domestic violence fatalities in Ohio were up by 35% from July 2019 through June 2020, and preliminary [data](#) shows that domestic violence homicides are on the rise in some U.S. cities.

Many of Ohio's domestic violence programs are responding to a spike in the number of families seeking help. The number of calls to hotlines nearly tripled at some programs in the last year, and the average crisis call took more than twice as long to handle, according to a survey conducted in January 2021.¹ Programs reported an increase in the severity and lethality of the abuse described by survivors seeking help, including an alarming increase in strangulation reports. Families also are staying longer in shelter.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network's 75 member programs served more than 82,000 survivors including nearly 12,500 children in 2019. They answered 97,667 crisis calls and sheltered 9,045 victims. Victims received counseling, court advocacy, help obtaining a protective order, or support while they prosecuted their abusers. With assistance from advocates, many families found safe, decent housing and began the process of rebuilding their lives.

For some perspective, according to the 2020 National Network to End Domestic Violence 24-hour census survey, in a single day in September 2020, our programs served 2,650 domestic violence survivors. They answered 676 crisis calls – that averages over 28 crisis calls per hour. Unfortunately, Ohio's programs turned away 252 victims – about 10% of requests made that day – because they didn't have enough room or resources to serve them.

¹ The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) surveyed its 75 member programs from January 8 to 25, 2021, about the effects of the pandemic on domestic violence prevalence. The survey also measured the effects of budget cuts in 2019 and 2020. A total of 63 programs responded, an 84% response rate.

Funding domestic violence programming is a good investment in Ohio's communities. One in four children in Ohio is exposed to domestic violence. By the time a child exposed to domestic violence reaches the age of 64, the cost to the economy is \$50,500 in increased health care and other costs and productivity losses, according to [The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio](#). As measured by one of our shelters, [every \\$1 spent on services saves the community \\$65.43 in social costs](#) avoided in police enforcement, lost work productivity, the justice system, and mental health services for adults and children served. Child protective services, law enforcement, prosecutors, and medical and mental health providers all rely on domestic violence programs to provide support and services to families experiencing domestic violence. Where do all of those providers send survivors to get safe and keep their children safe? Our shelters. Without proper funding for domestic violence programs, those same families and service providers lose a necessary partner to keep families safe.

Last fall Ohio's programs cut staff and services after crippling reductions to their most important federal funding source, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program. Ohio's VOCA grants to domestic violence programs were cut by \$7.7 million. From 2019-2021 grants will have been cut by nearly 75%. Our programs are being forced to lay off front-line staff, eliminate life-saving services, and cut essential community programming.

In 2019, Ohio became one of 33 states that provide state support for their programs. [Among the 33 states that provide state support for domestic violence services, Ohio's support is the lowest on a per capita basis – only 9 cents.](#) Compare that to our surrounding states, \$1 in Michigan, \$1.40 in West Virginia, \$1.49 in Pennsylvania and \$1.50 in Kentucky.

The \$1 million annual allocation in the state budget provided grants of \$17,800 to 47 residential programs that year and \$12,000 grants to 69 programs in 2020. The grants softened the blows of the VOCA cuts and helped programs fund basic services: repairs to vehicles and buildings, furniture and appliances, children's items, improving disability accommodations, food, and supporting staff pay. "The State of Ohio DV line item provides hope to local agencies as they realize state legislators do recognize the negative consequences of not addressing domestic violence on the local level," said the director of a rural program, who had to cut two staff positions after the VOCA cut. The program now has a skeleton crew of three and is in danger of closing.

Domestic violence programs have stood strong during the pandemic, providing essential services while meeting social distancing requirements, placing survivors with health needs in hotels, and dealing with staff reductions. Please support our ask for an increase in the domestic violence survivor services line item from \$2 million to \$10 million to provide a stable funding source for local domestic violence programs. Adult and child domestic violence victims depend on our emergency shelters and life-saving services when they are in crisis. Your communities are relying on your support to keep families safe.