



Senate Finance Committee  
May 28, 2025  
Ohio Victim Witness Association  
Elyse McConnell, Executive Director

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Elyse McConnell, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Victim Witness Association (OVWA). We represent over 540 victim advocates and allied professionals in prosecutor's offices, nonprofits, police forces, healthcare systems, and more. Like ourselves, most of our member organizations are multidisciplinary in nature, providing comprehensive, empathetic services to victims of all types of crime.

Victim advocates play an essential role in the justice system. They walk alongside victims as they pursue justice, healing, safety, and restitution. These services are time-intensive. Yet, today, victim advocates are stretched thin as they work to do more with less.

Until 2018, most victim's services organizations were primarily funded by federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants. Over the past seven years, distributions from this fund to Ohio have diminished by 76%, devastating the field of crime victims' services—and in turn, Ohioans who have been the victim of a crime.

To give you an example of how these cuts are felt by your local advocates, I'd like to share a testimonial from the Meigs County Victim Assistance Program, which is part of the Meigs County Prosecutor's Office.

"Due to cuts in funding, our program has been forced to reduce staff from three advocates—one dedicated solely to civil protection orders and two handling three courts—to only two advocates covering all three courts. This has left victims without the immediate assistance they need. Protection order assistance has been outsourced to a community-based advocate, Square One, but they, too, are overwhelmed. As a result, victims in dangerous situations often face delays in securing the legal protection they need to stay safe. These delays can leave survivors vulnerable to further harm, forced to remain in unsafe environments longer than necessary.

In our rural, impoverished community, alternative resources simply do not exist. Many victims end up disengaging from the legal process, not because they want to, but



because they have no means to continue. This results in cases being dropped and offenders going unpunished, creating a ripple effect of harm throughout the community. Without immediate action, more victims will be left without the support they desperately need, and our justice system will fail those it is meant to protect.”

The State of Ohio has stepped in to increase funding for several populations of crime victims, and we thank you for this support. This commitment has been incredible, and at the same time, there are victim services providers that are simply not eligible for the funding already set aside. This has left victims of homicide, assault, robbery, and other violent crimes receiving services from underfunded agencies. For this reason, I ask that you work to close this gap in services by supporting an amendment to allocate \$5 million annually for victim services agencies that serve a general victim population through the Attorney General’s office. Funds would be used to provide victims of crime with crisis response, victim advocacy, and other supportive services.

Studies have shown that victims who have connected with an advocate are more likely to participate in prosecution and to feel that the court process has been safe, fair, and responsive to their needs.<sup>1</sup> State support is needed to ensure that victims have access to the services that Ohio law now says they are entitled to.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/domesticViolence/topics/DVCourts/DVWorkingAdvocates.pdf>