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Congress Cuts Crime Victims Fund

The Deuterman Law Group recently represented a young, single mother who was seriously injured in a car crash caused by a drunk driver.

Hillary Holt, a waitress and single mom from Boone, was hit by a drunk driver while coming home from work one evening. The other driver was killed, and Hillary nearly was. In fact, she was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident, but a paramedic saw her finger twitch and she was flown by helicopter to a trauma center. Miraculously, Hillary survived, but she suffered horrible, debilitating injuries. (I'll write more about Hillary's case in a future blog entry.)

In handling Hillary's case, we became aware of the [The Crime Victims Fund](#), which among other things provides state grant money to reimburse victims of crime, like Hillary.

Established by the [Victims of Crime Act](#)

of 1984 (VOCA), was created to help provide services and compensation for victims of crime, including child abuse, homicide, rape and drunk driving. No taxpayer money is used; instead it is funded by criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and special assessments collected by U.S. Attorneys' Offices, federal U.S. courts, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Money from the Crime Victims Fund is used for a variety of purposes:

- **Child Abuse:**

As much as \$20 million annually is allocated to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases. The money is divided between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the federal Office for Victims of Crime.

- **Federal Criminal Justice System:**

Since 2000, fund money has been earmarked for the federal criminal justice system to improve services to victims of federal crimes by supporting the federal victim notification system. Money also goes towards salaries for victim coordinators and specialists in 94 U.S. Attorneys' Offices and 56 FBI field offices

- **Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve:**

As much as \$50 million annually is set aside for compensation and assistance services for victims of domestic and international terrorism and mass violence.

- **State Programs:**

The remainder of the money goes to the states to fund victims' compensation programs, which provide financial assistance to crime victims, and victim assistance programs, such as rape crisis, domestic violence shelters, crisis hotlines, counseling services and court advocacy programs.

Legislative Issue

The Crime Victims Fund is now valued at more than \$1 billion, but all that money is not being distributed to victim's compensation and assistance programs. Since 2000, Congress has placed a cap on the amount of money that can be spent from the fund each year. The cap amount remained steady at \$625 million since 2004. Because of inflation and growth in spending on federal victims' programs, the amount available for state victims' programs is now less than it was in 2006.

Congress recently set the cap at \$590 million for fiscal year 2008. This means that funding for state VOCA victim assistance grants will have been cut by 17 percent, a total of \$67 million, since 2006.

Officials who administer VOCA-funded victims' assistance programs had asked that the cap be raised to \$661 million in 2008.

But because Congress didn't do this, their programs will be state and local victims' assistance programs and victims will suffer.

Why? Because of the way that money from the Crime Victims' Fund is allocated, increases in other VOCA-funded programs leaves less money available for state victims' assistance groups. In 2007, state victims' programs received \$25 million less than they did in 2006. In 2008, these programs are set to lose another \$42 million in funding.

A cap of \$661 million would have merely restore funding for state victims' assistance programs to 2006 levels.

What Voters Can Do

Though the issue has been decided for 2008, this is an ongoing battle in Congress every year. Contact your elected officials in Congress and ask them to raise the cap on VOCA funding in 2008 to avoid further cuts in victim services. This federal appropriations decision will have an impact on state and local victims' programs in North Carolina, including rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters and victim/witness programs in the courts.

To find out who represents you in Congress and to write that [senator](#) or [representative](#) a letter, visit the links embedded here.

You can also write to members of the [Senate Appropriations](#) and [House Appropriations](#) Committees and ask them to support raising the VOCA cap in 2009. David Price, a Democrat representing the 4th District of North Carolina, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations.

In addition, encourage your legislators to join the House Crime Victims' Rights Caucus, which supports raising the cap on VOCA funding. They can join the Caucus by contacting the offices of Rep. Jim Costa at (202) 225-3341 or Rep. Ted Poe at (202) 225-6565