

[Skip to main navigation](#)[Skip to News Headlines](#)THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF LAW & PUBLIC SAFETYSearch [NJHome](#) | [Services A to Z](#) | [Departments/Agencies](#) | [FAQs](#)[OAG Home](#)[OAG Contact](#)[OAG Services from A - Z](#)[Servicios en Español](#)[News Release](#)[OAG Home](#)Anne Milgram
Attorney General

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609-292-4791**Office of The Attorney General**- Anne Milgram, *Attorney General*

Attorney General Milgram Calls on Congress to Restore Funding Cut from Front-Line Victim Assistance and Anti-Crime Programs - Urges Lawmakers to Reject Bush Administration Plan to Eliminate Programs in FY'09

TRENTON – Attorney General Anne Milgram today called on Congress to reverse federal budget cuts that reduced Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants by tens of millions of dollars this year – including a potential \$2.3 million cut for New Jersey – and reduced anti-crime grants under the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program by \$350 million nationally.

On the heels of those cuts, President Bush recently released his Fiscal Year 2009 budget request, which calls for elimination of some programs. It would replace the reliable formula-based grants awarded under Byrne-JAG with a reduced program using a competitive award process. The STOP Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant program – which provided \$3.2 million for victim assistance in New Jersey in FY 2006 and \$2.8 million in FY 2007 – would face a similar fate. VOCA would remain at a reduced level, and surplus VOCA funds would be diverted for other budget purposes. VOCA funding comes exclusively from fines, forfeitures and fees levied against federal criminal offenders. It is supposed to be used strictly for victim assistance.

Attorney General Milgram urged Congress to restore the grant funding that has been cut already and reject the Bush Administration budget proposals for FY 2009. During a recent trip to Washington, Milgram and other state attorneys general met with President Bush and U.S. Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey. Attorney General Milgram appealed personally to the president to restore the funding cut from the grant programs. She joined other attorneys general in writing Congressional leaders to ask them to put back the Byrne-JAG funds cut in FY 08.

Attorney General Milgram commended recent efforts in Congress – including efforts in the Senate spearheaded by Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey – to restore funding under these grant programs in FY 09 and protect the programs from President Bush's proposed changes.

“The cuts to the Victims of Crime Act funding are short-sighted and will have a devastating impact on programs in New Jersey that provide vital assistance to victims,” said Milgram. “The human cost of these cuts is immeasurable and completely

unnecessary, because there is a surplus of dedicated funding for victim assistance at the federal level. The Bush Administration is asking Congress to override VOCA so funds can be diverted to plug other budget holes.”

Due to the cut in VOCA funding, New Jersey’s award is expected to drop from \$10.4 million last year to about \$8 million this year. New Jersey received nearly \$11.3 million in 2006. The VOCA award is used in New Jersey to fund numerous victim services, including state-mandated sexual assault response teams, victim notification programs, victim witness offices in the county prosecutors’ offices, and counseling, shelter and other support services provided by nonprofits.

State officials have not yet been told how the cuts in the Byrne-JAG program for FY 2008 will impact the award amount for New Jersey law enforcement programs. In FY 2007, the federal government funded Byrne-JAG at \$520 million, but it was cut 67 percent to \$170 million for FY 2008. Byrne-JAG is currently the only source of federal funding available to local and state law enforcement for multi-jurisdictional task forces and is a critical source of funding for gang prevention efforts, drug courts and prisoner re-entry programs. New Jersey law enforcement agencies received \$7.6 million in JAG funding last year, and \$5.1 million in FY 2006.

“The Byrne grant program has provided millions of dollars each year for important local and state law enforcement initiatives in New Jersey,” said Attorney General Milgram. “The Bush Administration cut two-thirds of the Byrne funding for this year and is proposing to replace what has been a major source of stable funding with a much smaller, competitive grant program. Law enforcement cannot sustain critical crime prevention efforts in this climate of fiscal uncertainty.”

State officials also have not been told how the federal cuts in VAWA funding will impact New Jersey’s award amount. In order to supplement the federal funding, Governor Jon S. Corzine previously committed \$1.5 million in state funding to address violence against women. The Governor’s grants are expanding the number of programs receiving funds to assist women.

President Bush’s FY 2009 budget request to Congress includes the following proposals:

- The budget would cut state and local criminal justice programs by 65 percent and homeland security grant programs by 40 percent.
- The JAG formula and discretionary grant programs would be abolished, replaced by a new \$200 million competitive grant program called the Byrne Public Safety and Protection Program.
- A new Violence Against Women Grants program would consolidate the existing VAWA programs into one \$280 million competitive grant program.
- The budget would cap the VOCA Crime Victims Fund at \$590 million – the same level as FY 2008 – and rescind the Fund’s balance of \$2.02 billion to offset spending in other programmatic areas.

“We will continue to fight to preserve this crucial funding,” said Attorney General Milgram.

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[News Index Page | top](#)

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