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Federal funding cuts hamper HAVIN

 By [Renatta Signorini](#)

Leader Times

Friday, January 25, 2008

The money is there, they just can't have it.

For HAVIN (Helping Abuse Victims in Need), Inc., executive director Jo Ellen Bowman, that news is devastating. A cap that has been placed on federal funds for the 2008-09 fiscal year will result in a loss of about \$9,000 in federal funding for the Kittanning domestic abuse shelter and counseling center, she said.

A federal bill recently signed set a cap on Victims of Crime Act funds at \$590 million, down from \$625 million in the 2006-07 fiscal year. That reduction will negatively affect HAVIN's basic services, Bowman said.

People who commit crimes pay fines that are deposited in a pot of funds connected to the act, Bowman said, and that funding is allocated to support victims. The largest deposit ever was recently made, but the cap placed on the funds is decreasing what the nation's victim services, such as HAVIN, are receiving, she said.

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"The money is there," she said.

Carol Lowery, the state victim advocate, said the chances of reversing the cap are slim before it takes effect in July for the 2008-09 fiscal year. But since work on the federal budget for the 2000-10 fiscal year is beginning next month, there is much to be done for future funding, she said.

Community support is needed to eliminate future cuts or caps, Bowman said. Members of Congress can be contacted online, she said, and it is important that legislators hear from residents, not just victim services personnel.

"We're at a crisis point at this time," she said.

Lowery agreed it is important legislators see the cap's impact on Pennsylvania counties, victim services and communities.

Since Bowman became executive director at HAVIN, the service has lost \$85,741 in state and federal funds "and it's killing us," she said.

The organization is down to minimal staff. The cost of providing service and the number of people needing assistance are rising while funding is dwindling, she said.

"I can't provide services for free," she said.

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Bowman said she recently told HAVIN's board of directors: "I don't know how we're going to absorb another hit" and that she is concerned the shelter may have to close because of the critical money situation.

"I honestly don't know where we're going to get it from," she said.

The shelter is staffed 24 hours a day and its bills are increasing. Bowman's total budget is about \$600,000, which isn't a lot for running the organization, she said.

Unfortunately, she said, victim services seem to be a low priority when it comes to funding. Some people in abusive situations don't have alternative means other than coming to a shelter for help, Bowman said.

"Every year we serve more and more victims," she said.

Even so, only about 10 percent of victims seek assistance, she said. HAVIN served 670 people affected by domestic violence and 210 individuals affected by sexual assault in the 2006-07 fiscal year, she said.

Since July 1, 2007, the organization has served 410 people affected by domestic violence and 73 sexual assault victims, she said.

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