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## WRC has more to do, but less to do it with

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Two thousand, four hundred and sixteen.

That's how many women and children were helped last year by the Women's Resource Center's crisis response team. The group logged more than 7,800 hours of service last year, housing more than 120 women and children at its shelter and taking on 126 clients who needed help with custody, child support and other legal issues. Workers answered countless phone calls on the center's 24-hour hot line and brought a number of educational programs to community and school groups.

But it was also the first year the Women's Resource Center turned away as many women as it housed at the shelter. The requests for help have been so numerous that the justice center has done away with its waiting list because the women on it need help faster than the attorneys there can provide it.

The problem, a common one for nonprofit groups, is a lack of enough federal and state funding. While the community has been generous, it's not enough to keep the group afloat.

"We have been very efficient with our funding," said Women's Resource Center Executive Director Peg Ruddy. "When you're already operating on a shoestring, there aren't a lot of ways to save money."

Most concerning to Ms. Ruddy and others is a proposal by President Bush to divert millions of dollars in federal fines historically given to victims' services through the federal Victims of Crime Act.

Pennsylvania received about \$14.6 million in Victims of Crime Act money in 2007. Set up by Congress and President Reagan in 1984, the money comes from criminal fines, forfeitures, assessments and penalties. The money is divided between all the states and U.S. territories for victims' services and compensation programs.

But President Bush's proposal would move that money into the general fund, which would leave victims' services around the nation hurting. If the proposal goes through, the Victims of Crime Act money will disappear by 2010.

About a quarter of the Women's Resource Center's budget comes from the Victims of Crime Act money, Ms. Ruddy said. She and Carol Shoener, director at the center's Barbara J. Hart Justice Center, say losing that much funding would be devastating to the women who need help in the community.

"We serve about 2,100 women a year in Lackawanna and Susquehanna counties," Ms. Shoener said. "Take away a quarter of them. That's what we're looking at."

Without enough funding, the resource center will probably be forced to cut staff and services. That means there will be fewer people to respond to hospitals and police departments to lend help to battered women. The 24-hour hot line may become a 14- or 16-hour hot line if there aren't enough staffers to answer the calls.

"All of that money goes into the crisis center. If it goes away, we're talking about shutting down our satellite office," Ms. Rogers said. "There will be women and children who will not have access to safety."

It's not just the Women's Resource Center that will be affected should the Victims of Crime Act money disappear.

The Lackawanna County district attorney's office may also have to cut victims' services, First Assistant District Attorney Gene Talerico said. Many of the DA's office staffers are cross-funded, meaning people working in the victims and witness unit are paid by two or more funding sources. If the Victims of Crime Act money evaporates, it could mean staffers would be let go.

"It creates a serious concern about providing the type of services people expect," Mr. Talerico said. "I'd say 30 to 40 percent of our budget is (Victims of Crime Act) money."

Both the Women's Resource Center and the DA's office have talked to local politicians about their concerns.

U.S. Rep. Chris Carney, D-Dimock Township, says he's heard from constituents and signed a letter bound for the House Appropriations Committee to make sure the funding stays in place.

"Congress needs to take action to preserve full funding," he said in an e-mail. "These programs have provided valuable assistance to women and children for years; they are integral to our communities, and I will fight to protect their funding in Congress."

U.S. Rep. Paul E. Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke, said he's visited the Women's Resource Center and believes in the programs there.

"Without these organizations, women and children affected by domestic violence might not have anyone else to turn to," he said in an e-mail. "The federal government must continue to fund these programs."

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