

Kentucky's Domestic Violence Services Narrowly Escape the effects of Federal Funding Crisis

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[/EINPresswire.com/](#) -- [Domestic violence shelter programs](#) across Kentucky breathed a sigh of cautious relief after the biennial budget was finalized with the close of the legislative session on Monday.

The 2024-2026 budget provides an additional \$17 million in bridge funding to domestic violence shelter programs, sexual assault programs, and child advocacy programs serving victims and survivors impacted by interpersonal violence.

The State biennial appropriation comes as a response to a critical reduction in federal funding through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA grants are funded through the Crime Victims Fund, financed through federal criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, and penalties including those from federal deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements. However, the fund balance has been declining sharply since 2018, with contributions into the fund failing to meet the amounts needed by Kentucky's victim service providers.

As this significant funding stream continues to shrink, the financial uncertainty of Kentucky's victim service providers has steadily grown. In the past four years alone, [ZeroV's](#) member programs, the statutorily mandated domestic violence shelter programs, faced a 54% reduction in VOCA funding. With the passing of the federal FY24 budget, VOCA funds were reduced yet again by about \$600 million, a 30% cut nationwide.

With the help of State legislators, Kentucky's domestic violence shelter programs can continue providing crucial domestic violence services to survivors and their children for the year ahead.



ZeroV Staff tabling during Domestic Violence Advocacy Day at the Capitol Annex February 13, 2024

ZeroV CEO Angela Yannelli expressed gratitude for the General Assembly's commitment to help bridge the gap in funding so that lifesaving services for survivors can continue. "We have much more to do to ensure the Crime Victims Fund is once again a sustaining, reliable source of funding, but at least for now, there is some relief."

"The impact of national VOCA losses in other states are cautionary tales to our domestic violence programs in Kentucky," says Yannelli. "Outcomes such as layoffs, reduced shelter capacity, and program closures are happening across the nation at a time when the need for domestic violence services is on the rise. While the VOCA crisis is not a problem created by our State, we are exceedingly grateful to our State legislators and our Kentucky communities for their efforts to solve it."

Over the past 5 years, Kentucky's domestic violence shelter programs have served more than 10,000 adults and nearly 6,000 children. But the need for these critical services continues to grow, with more than 1,000 unmet requests for shelter in fiscal year 2023 alone.

"Our domestic violence programs have continued to provide services amid a global pandemic, multiple natural disasters in Kentucky, and growing economic uncertainty, without interruption, all while enduring the ongoing VOCA crisis," says Andrea Robinson, Board President of ZeroV and Executive Director of OASIS, the domestic violence shelter serving Green River Area Development District. "We applaud our state legislators for valuing the lives and safety of survivors in our Commonwealth, and with their help, we can continue to serve survivors."

While State legislators have stepped in to address the effects of the impending VOCA crisis, much work remains to be done at the federal level to create a permanent fix for this long-standing funding stream.

"Our programs cannot continue operating in survival mode," says Angela Yannelli. "The needs of survivors expand every day, and so should our funding streams. The lives and futures of Kentuckians depend on it."

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