April 8, 2024

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 1956 (Reyes) – Victim services.
**   As Amended March 4, 2024 – SUPPORT**
**   Set for Hearing April 10, 2024 – Assembly Appropriations Committee**

Dear Assembly Member Wicks:

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Urban Counties of California (UCC), and Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) write in support of AB 1956 by Assembly Member Eloise Gómez Reyes. This measure, upon appropriation of funds by the Legislature, would require the state to supplement federal support for the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), which provides grants for the delivery of crucial crime victim services.

The VOCA Crime Victims Fund (CVF) is a non-taxpayer source of funding that is financed by monetary penalties associated with federal criminal convictions, as well as penalties from federal deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements. Deposits into the CVF fluctuate based on the number of criminal cases that are handled by the United States Department of Justice (U.S. DOJ), with Congress determining on an annual basis how much to release from the CVF to states. Last year, according to the U.S. DOJ, the CVF balance was over $2.3 billion. Unfortunately, despite continual federal advocacy by counties and other organizations, Congress funded VOCA at $1.35 billion through their annual appropriation bill for U.S. DOJ programs in the 2024 fiscal year. This is a substantial reduction from the previous level of $1.9 billion in the last fiscal year, and most notably, continues the downward trend and represents a historic low. As such, the decline in funding will result in a fundamentally decreased level of service delivery to victims of crimes, and thus behooves supplemental state support.
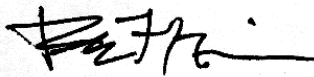
VOCA grants support a variety of locally administered victim services programs, including crisis intervention, domestic violence shelters, resources for victims of human trafficking, and programs for elder victims and victims with disabilities. VOCA grants also fund victim compensation

programs, which help survivors pay medical bills and recuperate lost wages. If federal funding levels remain low and continue to shrink, victim service providers across the state will be forced to lay off staff, cut programs, and shut down operations unless there is state assistance. As a member of the California Office of Emergency Services' (CalOES) VOCA Steering Committee, CSAC will continue to focus on the most effective and impactful programming, but ultimately, further decline in VOCA funding will reduce the number and amount of grants administered by CalOES, resulting in an immediate and direct impact on the delivery of victim services statewide.

Whereas VOCA is a federally funded program, and California is facing a significant budget shortfall, it is a sound policy decision to address funding gaps to ensure the continuity of existing victim services and preserve programs that meet the needs of some of our most vulnerable populations. Absent state support, counties will be faced with increasingly tough investment decisions in the months and years to come, which will yield a negative impact on critical, core state services delivered by counties.

It is for these reasons that CSAC, UCC, and RCRC are in strong support of AB 1956, which would guarantee a minimal level of funding to protect essential victim services in our state. Should you have any questions regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact Ryan Morimune at CSAC (rmorimune@counties.org), Elizabeth Espinosa at UCC (ehe@hbeadvocacy.com), or Sarah Dukett at RCRC (sdukett@rcrcnet.org). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Morimune
Legislative Advocate
CSAC

Elizabeth Espinosa
Legislative Representative
UCC

Sarah Dukett
Policy Advocate
RCRC

cc: The Honorable Buffy Wicks, California State Assembly
        The Honorable Eloise Gómez Reyes, California State Assembly
        Members and Consultant, Assembly Appropriations Committee