

IOWA'S INVESTMENT IN HOMICIDE AND VIOLENT CRIME SERVICES TO SURVIVORS

INTRODUCTION

This brief is a collaboration between multiple agencies that are at the forefront of providing services for survivors of homicide and other violent crimes. Currently the State appropriation for victim services is appropriated through the general fund of the state to the department of justice for the office of the attorney general to provide grants to care providers providing services to crime victims of domestic abuse or to crime victims of rape and sexual assault. The amount allocated for fiscal year 2019-2020 was \$5,016,708. This funding is important however there are services that are equally as profound and seriously needed that are completely missing from the State appropriations: the care provided to survivors of homicide and other violent crimes.

There has been an increase in homicide and violent crime across the country in the past 12 months and Iowa is no exception. Homicides across America rose more than 28 percent in the first nine months of this year, and aggravated assaults increased nine percent, according to statistics compiled this month by the Major Cities Chiefs Association and the Police Executive Research Forum. In Iowa the number of homicides in the first six months of the year surpassed the number of homicides in all of 2019. Homicides and other violent crimes have always wreaked havoc on the lives of survivors. The Covid-19 pandemic has served to intensify not only the amount of violent crime but the way in which survivors can effectively heal, due to a struggling economy, increased racial tension and a persistent lack of resources. This affects black and indigenous communities harder than others, particularly the black community. In 2020 more than half of Des Moines Homicide victims are Black, and Iowa saw six high profile violent crimes in a period of four months. Three of which were clearly motivated by anti-black racism. Prior to the pandemic and now, 1/3 of homicide victims in Iowa are black despite the fact that the Black community only makes up 4 percent of the population. The State of Iowa can no longer ignore this issue and should invest in proven resources that aid in the support of survivors of homicide and violent crime.

When we survey advocates across the state who regularly provide care and support to survivors of violent crime, they are told consistently by survivors that the most important assistance they receive is the assistance of the homicide and violent crime advocate. Compensation funds are a tremendous help to survivors of violent crime however, many either do not know the fund exists or are unable during the time of their trauma to accurately access those funds. Violent crime advocates are invaluable in assisting survivors with accessing compensation. In addition, since advocates are housed in the communities in which they live, they have knowledge of and access to resources that survivors truly need;

including assistance with housing, funeral arrangements, medical care, legal assistance, assistance navigating the press, transportation, childcare, food, support groups, and many others.

A NEW LOOK AT VICTIM SERVICES

Currently the victim services movement is predominately seen through the lens of domestic violence and sexual assault. While these crimes are of the utmost importance they are not the whole of victim services. The State of Iowa provides funding for these services and provides none for survivors of homicide and violent crime as the crime victim compensation fund which is available to victims of all crime types is made up of fines and penalties. As a result, the work that survivors say they need is provided with limited federal funding and more often is provided with no funding at all. Communities have invested time, energy and resources at their expense while the State of Iowa has neglected to make an investment to meet suffering communities part of the way.

Access - a community based agency that provides services to victims and survivors of violent crime in Boone, Marshall and Story counties; assists survivors through advocacy, information and referrals, emotional support, family and individual counseling, and information on crime victim rights. Due to a lack of State funding the agency may have to suspend those services. The Executive Director writes:

Our violent crime program – like most – is incredibly underfunded and understaffed. We have had to triage and it isn't fair to the communities we serve. We have no time to do the kind of community outreach and relationship building that would be required to have survivors get support outside of the criminal justice system. I don't have a hard and fast number, but I would venture a guess that upwards of 90% of the clients we serve in this program are referrals directly from law enforcement or the county attorney. This is the opposite of what we see in all other victim services. It also means survivors that don't report or don't feel comfortable with law enforcement aren't accessing our services. This is a major problem when thinking about serving BIPOC and LGBTQ survivors. We are working on some internal practices and also need the task to not be so impossible with so few resources. A staff of one just cannot do good community building work in three counties.

- *We have had very limited staff capacity to offer support groups or focus on survivor safety, dignity, grief and healing in other ways. AND at the same time when survivors talk about what mattered the most it is always about emotional supports. We need to invest as a state in the kinds of services that can help make community members whole.*

- The allocation we get from CVAD doesn't cover the staff time to run the program, has no administrative costs, no operations, no office rent...nothing. Roughly 50% of the budget for this service comes from fundraised dollars. As an agency only about 15 percent of our total agency budget is fundraised dollars. Pulling such a disproportionate share from fundraising is not sustainable—especially in a time of economic downturn like we are currently experiencing.
- Of the CVAD funds we do receive, 90-ish percent are VOCA funds. If we sustain a significant hit due to the VOCA cuts we must seriously consider stopping providing these vital services.
- We have approached local grantors about supporting increasing these services and they are afraid to be the first new funder, but are interested in matching state funds. We need something to bargain with as it feels like chicken and the egg. We can't get local support without stronger state support.

Another agency that provides services to Benton, Des Moines, Henry, Iowa, Jefferson, Johnson, Jones, Keokuk, Lee, Linn, Poweshiek, Tama, Van Buren, and Washington counties, addresses needs of violent crime victims and families and friends of homicide and vehicular homicide victims, whether or not charges are filed. Benefits include emergency crisis support, facilitating communication between the criminal justice system and the victim, court accompaniment, case coordination, assistance with compensation, and post-conviction support. These important services are in serious jeopardy. As told by one violent crime advocate:

I wanted to give you some insight into my area. I serve the rural area of Southeast Iowa. To say the population is underserved is an understatement. Many counties (such as mine) are food deserts where the main place to shop for food is the local Dollar General or Casey's. Poverty is the highest in Iowa as is drug use.

I cover 7 counties, totaling 2,912 square miles. I work with 8 different court systems and 12 different prosecutors. Some of my counties have no "victim witness" coordinators which creates a real dilemma in keeping survivors notified of hearings etc. In 2019-2020 I worked 20 homicides in my assigned area in addition to assisting victims of other violent crimes. From those homicides, I assisted 120 family members with court attendance, counseling, transportation to and from hearings, lodging during trials, meals, victims compensation, funeral arrangement and a myriad of other assistance. If funding is cut for the survivors program we will no longer be able refer to the loved ones as survivors as they will once again become victims. I can't

imagine what some of my families would do without the program. Homicide impacts families from all walks of life. One week I'm serving an impoverished mother who lost her son in a senseless gang related shooting, the next, I'm assisting a mother from a different walk of life who lost her son to a drunk driver. Both need the encouragement, support and love that our program provides.

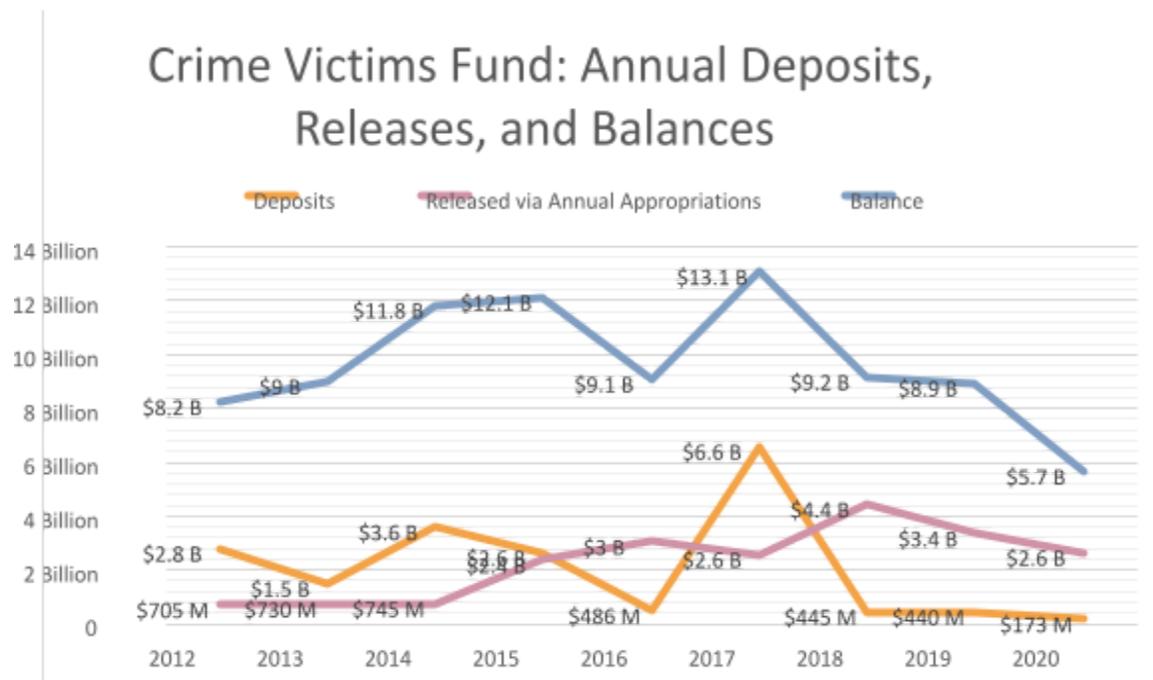
These stories are just two of many that the Iowa Coalition for Collective Change has heard from advocates that have been overwhelmed attempting to provide assistance to fellow Iowans. In every area of the state, homicide and violent crime has increased in the last 12 months which mirrors rise in violent crime across the nation.

- Advocates providing services in Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Calhoun, Franklin, Greene, Grundy, Hamilton, Hardin, Humboldt, Kossuth, Pocahontas, Webster and Wright counties:
 - **250** clients between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019.
 - However from January 1, 2020 - December 22, 2020 the number of clients served was **309**.
- Adair, Adams, Audubon, Buena Vista, Carroll, Cass, Cherokee, Clay, Crawford, Dickinson, Emmet, Fremont, Harrison, Ida, Lyon, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, O'Brien, Osceola, Page, Palo Alto, Plymouth, Pottawattamie, Sac, Shelby, Sioux, Taylor, Woodbury
 - Calendar year clients served (January 1 – December 31)
 - 2019: 475
 - 2020: 579
- Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, Louisa, Muscatine, Scott Counties
 - In 2019, we served 441 individuals and in
 - 2020, we served 500 individuals.

In the Black community specifically there have been several high profile violent crimes. The community has had to come together to do a massive amount of work to assist the victims, their families, and the affected communities utilizing fundraised dollars. It is this kind of work that is worth the State's investment. We know that when communities do the work for their own, the services are unparalleled. With additional funding we can expand the work that we've seen the community do for the families of homicide and other violent crime victims and conduct further research into additional proven models of success.

THE NATION'S INVESTMENT IN HOMICIDE AND VIOLENT CRIME

While the entire nation is now invested in homicide and its intersection in racial justice, the fund that exists to allow services to extend to the surviving families of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is largely dominated by providers of domestic violence and sexual assault initiatives. Because of that domination, critical components of VOCA are not widely used to assist families in need. The advocacy that has been put forth on the Federal level has missed an important aspect of the intent of the funds to address homicide, other violent crime and the systemic social issues which derive from institutional racism and as a result those funds are now in jeopardy at the Federal level.



IOWA'S INVESTMENT IN HOMICIDE AND VIOLENT CRIME

In Iowa, the state has appropriated funds to assist programs with providing services which supports match for VOCA and offers additional funding during times when the federal VOCA funds are cut. The support however ONLY extends to services for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. This leaves the surviving families of homicide and other violent crimes with little to no resources supported by the state. The only support to provide service advocates for these families and individuals come from federal funds. In 2018, the Iowa Attorney General began to expand the use of VOCA funds to specifically address the provision of services to survivors of homicides and violent crime with a focus on the Black community. The Iowa Coalition For Collective Change and Creative Visions were funded to



accomplish this task. That decision has afforded us the ability to collaborate with other grassroots organizations to provide much needed services to survivors of homicide in a way that is not only unique to our community but is and also are best practices for all communities in Iowa. We have been able to educate the public not only on services but also on the Crime Victim Compensation fund. Initial data shows that compensation applications are up by one hundred applications compared to this time last year. This is a result of collaborative community advocacy. In addition, we have also been able to observe some incredible best practices that actually made an unintended contribution to the **prevention and intervention** of homicide. It is these grassroots strategies employed by communities for communities that is more than worth the State's investment into homicide and violent crime victim services rather than a singular focus on domestic violence and sexual assault.

THE VICTIM SERVICES MOVEMENT AND THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

As we've seen this year, the entire world has come to an understanding that the movement in support of Black lives is centered around making the world a safer and more just place for Black people to live. An intricate part of justice for the Black community includes human and social services for the survivors of violent crimes. Community based homicide and violent crime advocates have a deep understanding of the intersection of racial justice and violence. Racial justice sits at the root of successful violent crime services. This is an important difference between domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy and community based violent crime advocacy. .We see this more clearly when we consider the activities that happened this year around racial justice. Those activities spawned the DV and SA movement to pen "The moment of truth" letter in which predominantly white female led DV and SA organizations apologized for ignoring the voices of Black, Indigenous and other people of color who lead organizations that employ specific successful strategies to end violence in our own communities. Organizations like The Iowa Coalition for Collective Change and Creative Visions and many others. Therefore the reason you will not see our names and organizations as signers on this letter is because that letter was written **to us**, not **by us**.

THE CONNECTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND POTENTIAL STATE SAVINGS

When we employ a cost benefit analysis and connect this work to criminal justice reform, data from 2017 gives us a glimpse into the potential savings an upfront investment could mean for our state. The disproportionate rate of African American incarceration is in itself a violent act against the community. When community members are lost to incarceration it has a direct result on the very resources that have been shown to reduce violence and increase healing for victims of violence; economics, housing and health. These resources are more unattainable post incarceration. The grassroots victim service efforts employed by communities are rooted in increasing access to these resources. Criminal justice reform that



has been deemed a priority by the Governor can greatly benefit through collaborations with properly resourced community violent crime advocates. In addition, the voices of victims should always be present in any type of criminal justice reform as they are the clients the criminal justice system speaks for. This collaboration will move the state closer to the budget savings outlined below.

Iowa's prisons cost \$95.85 per inmate per day in the 2017 Fiscal Year.

At that level of spending, the state would save \$71,194,983.75 each year if it reduced the prison incarceration rate of African-Americans to the rate of white incarceration.

Those savings would be greater than Iowa's general fund appropriations for Agriculture and Natural Resources (\$37,786,995), Economic Development (\$43,744,465), the Public Defender system (\$58,784,172), and The College Student Aid Commission (\$64,776,888) in the 2016 Fiscal Year.

It is a wise investment for Iowa to appropriate funds specifically to victim services specifically for homicide and violent crime and particularly services for the black community. Currently the state allocation in victim services for homicide and violent crime is ZERO dollars. As violent crime incidents increased in 2020, and 31% of homicide victims in Iowa are black it is unacceptable that the State invests no money in solutions and services to survivors. We ask for support to rectify this through an additional allocation equal to the amount of funding given to domestic violence and sexual assault respectively. That fair amount begins at \$2.5 million in 2021.