My name is **[INSERT YOUR NAME**], and I am a constituent writing you from Winchester, Virginia to urge you to support and co-sponsor S.611, the bipartisan *VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021 (“the VOCA Fix Act”)*.

The Laurel Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides emergency shelter and support services to victims of domestic and sexual assault. The Crime Victims Fund is the primary funding source to the Laurel Center and many other domestic and sexual assault organizations across Virginia. On May 20th, The Laurel Center was notified that the Victims Services Grant Program (VSGP) which is funded through the Crime Victims Fund and which we rely on to provide services to victims of violence will be cut by $300,000 and take effect on July 1, 2021. The short notice and significant financial cut will result in services being cut to a vulnerable population of Virginians.

The Laurel Center is an essential services provider, remaining open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, providing critical support because of mounting data that suggested domestic abuse was acting like an opportunistic infection that flourished under lockdown conditions. Unlike healthcare providers, staff at The Laurel Center, and most domestic violence shelters, had very little personal protective equipment (PPE) and worked overtime to keep our emergency shelters open and to provide supportive services. Despite these significant challenges, we continued to focus on what was important – protecting abused individuals. Now, just when we thought the worst was over, we receive the devastating news that funding is being cut.

The pandemic has exacerbated domestic violence by creating job loss and increasing mental health issues, thereby increasing the need for services. With all attention focusing on curbing a public health crisis, the problem of private violence appears to have been overlooked or deprioritized by our federal government.

At this time, the focus should be on providing more resources to help domestic and sexual violence programs to address the increased demand for services, otherwise we will experience a secondary pandemic, that of homelessness. Domestic Violence is consistently identified as a significant factor in homelessness. A staggering 92% of women experiencing homelessness report having experienced severe physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives and 50% of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.

The VOCA Fix Act bill passed the house on March 17, 2021 and has yet to be taken up by the Senate for consideration. I cannot state strongly enough that the Senate must swiftly pass this bill as a means to restore much needed grant funding. Survivors and the organizations that support them cannot wait another minute. Please act now to support the VOCA Fix Act, which will restore victim services funding and ensure survivors in crisis the help they need.

Sincerely,