Ten Things You Should Know About VOCA

1. The Victims of Crime Act, passed in 1984 under President Ronald Reagan, created the Victims of Crime Act Fund, or VOCA Fund, to be a protected and dedicated source of funding for crime victim programs.

2. The VOCA Fund does not depend on taxpayer dollars – it is derived from fines and penalties on offenders at the federal level.

3. VOCA dollars are distributed to the states to support two important types of programs: crime victim compensation programs, which pay many of the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by victims as a result of crime, and victim assistance programs, which provide victims with support and guidance in the aftermath of crime.

4. Nearly 4 million victims a year are served by more than 4,000 local and state victim service agencies funded by VOCA.

5. VOCA assistance grants support programs that provide assistance to victims of all kinds of crime including victims of assault, robbery, gang violence, intoxicated drivers, fraud, elder abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, stalking and survivors of homicide, tribal victims, and many others.

6. VOCA also supports victim assistance for those involved in the federal criminal justice system, including survivors of terrorist acts.

7. While the VOCA Fund has been very successful in creating a strong web of services for many victims, there are still too few services for rural victims, teen victims, elderly victims, disabled victims, non-English speaking victims, and many others.

8. Because the Fund is comprised of offender penalties and fines, the amount in the Fund fluctuates from year to year. For the last several years, Congress has created a special reserve of VOCA dollars for use in leaner years, by placing a cap on the Fund and saving the amount collected over the cap to ensure the stability of the Fund. Currently, the VOCA Fund has an estimated balance of $9 billion.

9. While FY 2015 appropriations are not yet final, the expected cap on VOCA funding is $770 million. This level funding comes despite growing recognition of the unmet needs of victims of both longstanding crimes, such as sexual assault and elder abuse, and emerging crimes such as human trafficking and cybercrime.

10. Congress and the administration should keep their promise to victims, and release more VOCA Funds to help victims of crime recover. Congress should establish a policy of setting the annual cap at least at the level of the previous year's deposits into the Crime Victims Fund. This will allow Congress to distribute each year's deposits for victim services so that victim service organizations can take greater advantage of the VOCA funding.