The Honorable Kim Reynolds Governor of Iowa Iowa State Capitol; 1007 E. Grand Avenue Des Moines, Iowa 50319

CC: The Honorable Brenna Bird, Attorney General of Iowa

August 9, 2024

RE: Requesting at least \$10 million in Justice System budget for crime victim services

Dear Governor Reynolds:

As victim service provider agencies who are members of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault and on behalf of the crime victims we collectively serve, we write to request you include at least \$10 million in state funding for victim services in your Justice System budget proposal to ensure consistent statewide access to crime victim support services. Our agencies support victims of sexual and domestic violence, rape, human trafficking, child abuse, stalking, and families impacted by homicide. Last year, these agencies served most of the 54,404 crime victims seeking assistance from organizations receiving public funds administered by the Iowa Attorney General's Victim Assistance Section.

Victim service providers rely on state, federal, and private funds to support crime victims. Federal funding remains the largest source of funding, and we sincerely appreciate your leadership in allocating ARPA funding to mitigate the impact of the catastrophic 42% cut to lowa's FY 24 VOCA grant and largest source of victim services funding. However, federal funds are meant to improve access to comprehensive services, they were never intended to replace state funds. States are expected to do their part, and we ask that you extend your historic commitment to crime victims by including an increase in state funding in your budget proposal this year. For the last decade lowa has provided only \$5 million for victim services each year despite increased demand for services and declining and inconsistent federal funding. (Summary of funding sources)

Crime victims seeking help are being turned away right now and access to services in rural areas and to the post-crisis support most crime victims request is already undermined by lack of resources. Although a significant increase in funding for victim services is needed, increased *state* investment was needed long before the decline in federal funds. The amount of funding for victim services directly impacts the number of victims agencies can support, the type and quality of services available, and where victims can access services. It takes all of us to support crime victims. Consistent and dedicated state funds must be available to ensure a vital service provider workforce and to ensure statewide access to quality services.

lowa can do better because crime victims deserve no less. Violent crime victims experience significant challenges to getting back on their feet. Investing in victim services help individuals reclaim their lives and become contributing members of families, communities, and valued employees of lowa businesses. Post-crisis services are the most frequently requested because victims need support beyond what family and friends can provide. Serving rural areas; supporting rape, human trafficking, or child abuse victims; and helping victims find stable housing or navigate legal proceedings are resource intensive because these victims have comprehensive needs. Lack of funding means fewer victims can access the stabilizing services most victims want because agencies cannot maintain staff or infrastructure to offer these services. (List of services)

The Justice System budget supports a broad range of stakeholders working to improve public safety and support crime victims and sadly, the least well-known and most under-valued are victim service providers. Victim service providers help crime victims access safety, economic security, and self-determination after experiencing violence inflicted on their minds and bodies by someone they know. They tirelessly work alongside law enforcement, lawyers, judges, and other service providers. They work with first responders offering crisis support or helping victims access medical care. After the crisis, agencies offer counseling and safety planning, they help victims replace identity documents, apply for victim compensation, understand their rights, navigate and accompany them in legal proceedings, complete job applications, find stable housing, and access food.

Recovering from or escaping violence generally means losing economic security as well as the means to regain it. Investing in victim services helps individuals heal and helps prevent violence. Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a pervasive but preventable <u>public health</u> problem impacting almost 1 in 2 women and more than 40% of men over a lifetime. It results in staggering human and economic costs because victimization is so pervasive and lifechanging that the ripple effects negatively impact entire communities and public safety. A national <u>study</u> estimates the lifetime economic cost burden for the U.S. population to be \$3.6 trillion and \$35 billion in <u>lowa</u>.

In addition to the obvious impact on individuals and families, given the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence, consider that every business or organization employs people who are victims or perpetrators. The lost productivity due to victimization increases employer costs and violence in the workplace impacts the safety of employees and customers. When a parent is a victim or a partner goes to prison, households lose 1-2 wage earners, children lose one or both parents, resulting in more children struggling in school, more struggling families, and the cycle continues.

Failing to fully support victims means people and communities lose the capacity to thrive. Failing to invest in victim services keeps violence alive in every community, and keeps preventable costs high for every business, workplace, school, and 'system' (legal, health care, child welfare). Yet most victims cannot access the support they need. A <u>national survey</u> of crime victims found that nearly 1 in 2 did not know where to find support; 74% did not receive counseling or mental health support; and 87% did not receive economic assistance to help recover costs.

Victim service provider agencies do not have enough staff to cover their enormous service areas and without additional funding they cannot offer the salaries, training, or benefits that would enable them to recruit or maintain the workforce needed to fully support crime victims. After a 2015 lowa victim advocate salary/benefit study found the salary of most fell far short of a living wage with many eligible for public assistance, a starting salary of \$32,000 was recommended. But lack of resources means salaries have not changed much since. The 2024 federal poverty level for a family of four is \$31,200 or about \$15 per hour without benefits. Compare the average victim advocate salary to similar jobs: average paralegal salary is \$60K; average patient navigator salary is \$54K, average child protective services staff salary is \$56K and all can access better benefits than victim service provider agencies can offer (info accessed July 2024).

Fully supporting crime victims must include increased state investment in victim services and valuing the work of service providers who dedicate their lives to helping victims recover from violence that has forever changed their lives. Victim-blaming persists in numerous ways that contributes to undervaluing sexual and domestic violence victims as well as the workforce dedicated to supporting them. Please choose to increase state investment in victim services.

It takes all of us to support crime victims. Service providers are stretched beyond capacity and cannot effectively meet the demand for victim services without additional state funding. Regardless of the amount of funding from other sources, lowa needs to do its part. As you draft your budget proposal, please request at least \$10 million for victim services in the Justice System budget. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Corona, PhD; Executive Director Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Tamika D. Payne; Executive Director **lowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault**

Iowa Crime Victim Service Provider Agencies:

Lisa A Ambrose; CEO; Amani Community Services; Waterloo

Culturally specific victim support services for Black/African American communities

Gwen Bramlet-Hecker; Executive Director; Riverview Center; Dubuque

Sexual assault support services for 14 counties in NE Iowa

Ben Brustkern; Executive Director; Friends of the Family; Waterloo

Shelter/housing support services for 14 counties in NE Iowa

Melissa Cano Zelaya; Executive Director; Latinas Unidas por un Nuevo Amanecer (L.U.N.A.); Des Moines

Culturally specific victim support services for Latino communities

Nicole Cisne Durbin; CEO; Family Resources; Davenport

Domestic/sexual violence, housing, human trafficking, homicide support services for 5 counties in SE Iowa

Carson Eggland; Executive Director; Helping Services for Youth & Families; Decorah

Domestic violence support services for 7 counties in NE Iowa

Kristie Fortmann-Doser; Executive Director; Domestic Violence Intervention Program; Iowa City

Domestic violence & shelter/housing support services for 8 counties in SE lowa

Pearl Hammes; Executive Director; Crisis Intervention Services; Oskaloosa

Sexual assault, Shelter, Homicide support services for 12 counties in South Central Iowa

Nelly Hill; Program Director, Domestic Violence Victim Services; Waypoint; Cedar Rapids

Domestic violence & homicide support services for 7 counties in NE Iowa

Mary J. Ingham; Executive Director; Crisis Intervention Service; Mason City

Domestic violence, sexual assault, & homicide support services for 23 counties in North Central/NE Iowa

Ebony Jackman, Outreach Coordinator

Children and Families of Iowa, Domestic Violence Services; Des Moines

Domestic violence & shelter support services for Polk & Warren counties

Hibo Jama; Executive Director; Nisaa African Family Services; Des Moines

Culturally specific victim support services for African immigrant/refugee communities

Brenda McBride: Executive Director: Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center; Fort Dodge

Domestic violence, homicide, housing/shelter support services for 20 counties in North Central Iowa

Stephanie Pickinpaugh; Executive Director; SafePlace; Sioux City

Domestic violence support services for Plymouth & Woodbury counties; shelter services for 19 counties in NW Iowa

Jessica Rohrs; Executive Director; Family Crisis Centers; Sioux Center

Statewide Victim Call Center ('hotline'); Domestic violence, human trafficking, homicide services in NW Iowa

Iowa Crime Victim Service Provider Agencies (cont):

Sapana Sharma; Assistant Director of Programs

Catholic Charities Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Program; Council Bluffs

Domestic violence & sexual assault support services for 9 counties; shelter services for 19 counties in SW Iowa

Abigail Sui; Executive Director; **EMBARC; Des Moines**Culturally specific victim support services for immigrant/refugee communities

Johna Sullivan; Executive Director; **Crisis Intervention & Advocacy Center; Adel**Domestic violence, sexual assault & homicide support services for 10 counties in SW Iowa

Lorraine Uehling; Executive Director; **Family Crisis Center; Ottumwa**Domestic violence support services for 12 counties in South Central Iowa

Mira Yusef; MSW, MA; Executive Director; **Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity; Des Moines** *Culturally specific victim support services for API communities*

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