



National Task Force to End Sexual & Domestic Violence

Toolkit for the Fourth COVID-19 Package

Contact your Members of Congress by phone, submit op-eds and letters to the editor to your local newspaper, and email your Members of Congress through their websites. You can also contact them via social media, but please also call, email, and submit op-eds.

You can find your Senators and their contact information [HERE](#) and your Representative and their contact information [HERE](#). Consider calling their district offices instead of or in addition to their DC offices. You can find Members' social media handles [HERE](#).

In this toolkit, you will find:

- 1) A [list](#) of the domestic and sexual violence fields' priorities for the fourth COVID-19 supplemental funding package
- 2) [A call script and sample email](#)
- 3) [A letter to the editor template and op-ed template](#)
- 4) [Survivor stories and links to local news articles](#)
- 5) [Links to supporting materials](#)
- 6) [Sample social media posts](#)

Priorities for the upcoming COVID-19 supplemental appropriations package

The COVID-19 crisis has led to an increase in domestic violence and compounded trauma for survivors of sexual assault. Both COVID-19 itself and the crisis caused by the pandemic disproportionately impact survivors in communities of color. While both the need for and the expense of providing sexual assault and domestic violence services are increasing, many programs have seen a decrease in donations due to the economic downturn and other COVID-19 related factors. Despite the desperate need for victim services, none of the previous COVID-19 packages signed into law have included funding for sexual violence services, for culturally specific organizations, or for tribes.

Congress cannot ignore the needs of survivors *again*. In the next COVID-19 package, Congress must:

- 1) Provide [dedicated funding](#) for culturally-specific organizations that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- 2) Address the needs of survivors by funding [sexual assault services](#);
- 3) Prevent drastic cuts to victim services funding that would compromise programs' ability to meet the increased need caused by COVID-19 without spending taxpayer money by [increasing deposits](#) into the Crime Victims Fund and by temporarily waiving match requirements for Victims of Crime Act victim assistance grants.
- 4) Provide [funding for tribal governments](#) to provide domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- 5) Provide more funding for domestic and sexual violence programs through a VAWA formula grant directly to victim service programs;
- 6) Ensure that access to safety for [immigrant survivors](#) is not compromised by immigration enforcement;
- 7) Allow states to make survivors eligible for [unemployment insurance](#) if they leave their jobs due to domestic or sexual violence.

Call script and sample email

The call script below can be used as the text of an email, too. The text can be used as-is, or you can make it even more powerful by sharing information about how COVID-19 is impacting survivors in your community. If you don't have any local information, see if your city or state is on this [nonexhaustive list](#) of communities that saw an increase in domestic or sexual violence before mid-June. Be sure to read the source documents included in the list for details! You can also feel free to use any of the survivor or advocate stories found [here](#) verbatim in order to illustrate the impact on individual survivors. If you are writing an email, also feel free to include one or more of the fact sheets found [here](#).

"Hello. My name is [your name], and I am a constituent [calling/emailing] from [your location and, if applicable, your program]. COVID-19 disproportionately impacts victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and in Black communities and other communities of color, that impact is compounded by systemic racism. Survivors of sexual assault and survivors from communities of color have been left out of all of the enacted COVID-19 packages so far. Congress must act to support survivors and address their needs - survivors cannot be left out again!

[Insert local information or a survivor story]

“The Senate bill must ensure that funding for critical victim services is not cut! The bill must increase deposits into the Crime Victims Fund and waive match victim assistance match requirements during the COVID-19 crisis - the Crime Victims Fund is not funded by taxpayer money and is a lifeline for many victim service providers. It must also include dedicated funding for culturally-specific organizations, for sexual assault services, and for Tribes. The phase four COVID package should also provide more funding for domestic and sexual violence programs through a VAWA formula grant directly to victim service programs, allow states to provide unemployment insurance for survivors who leave their jobs due to domestic or sexual violence, and restrict immigration enforcement during the COVID-19 emergency. Will you support these provisions to ensure your constituents who are survivors have access to safety and services?”

Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

A good op-ed is succinct and makes a point. You have a message to get across to people - focus on that rather than going off on tangents. An op-ed can usually be *up to 650 words*, and a letter to the editor is usually between *200 and 300 words*. Check your newspaper’s policies for specific length information and for submission instructions. Please feel free to use the templates below or write your own from scratch!

You can make your op-ed or letter to the editor even more powerful by sharing information about how COVID-19 is impacting survivors in your community. If you don’t have any local information, see if your city or state is on this [nonexhaustive list](#) of communities that saw an increase in domestic or sexual violence before mid-June. Be sure to read the source documents included in the list for details! You can also feel free to use any of the survivor or advocate stories found [here](#) verbatim in order to illustrate the impact on individual survivors.

Letter to the Editor Template:

Dear Editor,

It is time for Congress to stop ignoring the impact of COVID-19 on victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence. None of the previous COVID-19 enacted supplemental appropriations packages has included funding for services for sexual violence, for culturally-specific organizations serving survivors in Communities of Color, or for tribal governments to provide victim services. This is at a time when, due to COVID-19, domestic violence is increasing and survivors of sexual assault are being retraumatized and have significantly more complex needs.

Sexual and domestic violence organizations need more resources in order to be able to help the survivors who walk through their doors, particularly as the cost of providing services increase and donations decrease due to the economic downturn. I call on [*insert your Members of Congress*] to be champions for provisions in the next COVID package to provide dedicated funding for [culturally-specific organizations](#), to provide supplemental funding for the [Sexual Assault Services Program](#), to [increase \(nontaxpayer\) deposits](#) into the Crime Victims Fund, to [fund tribal victim services](#), to ensure [safety for immigrant survivors](#), and to make survivors eligible for [unemployment insurance](#) if they leave their jobs due to violence.

Op-Ed Template:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on every facet of life. It has transformed the way that people work, parent, and interact. It changes where people go and who they talk to. In far too many cases, it means that people are unemployed and facing countless economic stressors as well as fear of contracting COVID-19. Due to systemic racism, COVID-19 disproportionately impacts Black communities, Indigenous communities, and other communities of color.

[Empirical data](#) show that widespread crises are associated with increases in both the frequency and severity of intimate partner and sexual violence. This is as true of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) as of the great recession, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural and human-made disasters. Rates of intimate partner violence are increasing, and people are isolated with their abusers. Sexual assault survivors are being retraumatized and facing more complex traumas. Moreover, the economic crisis puts women at greater risk of sexual coercion, as employers threaten to fire people and landlords threaten to evict people to extort nonconsensual sexual contact.

For example, [*add information about your community or use one of the stories below. If you are a survivor or work in the DV/SA field and feel comfortable disclosing, include that information*].

Increases in violence and trauma translate into an increased need for services at a time when providing services is more expensive and more complicated. Victim service providers face unprecedented challenges in reaching survivors, requiring them to build out infrastructure to provide remote services and to ensure survivors have the technology to access those services, including providing internet-enabled devices and internet access. To maintain social distancing, domestic violence shelters are providing hotel vouchers, which is far more costly than housing survivors on-site.

While the need for services and the costs of providing such services are increasing, victim service providers have fewer resources. Charitable giving to programs has decreased as unemployment has increased and donors are diverting resources to address other

COVID-19-related social ills. Moreover, many sexual assault programs were forced to cancel their April flagship in-person fundraisers due to the need to social distance. The increased need and decreased resources are compounded in communities of color, where programs were already under-resourced and which are disproportionately impacted by both COVID-19 itself and the attendant economic crisis.

Congress has now passed four COVID-19 relief packages, and not a single one of them included funding for sexual assault services, for culturally-specific organizations, or for tribal victim services. Congress's inaction when faced with a very clear connection between interpersonal violence and COVID-19 is unacceptable. I call on Senators [*insert your Senators' names*] and Representative [*insert your Representative's name*] to stand up for survivors and push for the following provisions to be included in the next COVID-19 relief package:

- A fix to increase deposits into the Crime Victims Fund to avoid cuts to federal grants for victim services without spending taxpayer money
- Funding for culturally-specific organizations providing domestic violence or sexual assault services
- Funding for sexual assault services
- More funding for domestic and domestic violence programs through a VAWA grant directly to victim service providers
- Ensure access to safety, healthcare, and economic supports for immigrant survivors
- Allow states to make survivors eligible for unemployment insurance if they leave their jobs due to domestic or sexual violence

Senators [*insert your Senators' names*] and Representative [*Insert your Representative's name*], as a constituent, I call on you to take a stand for your constituents, and do not let Congress ignore the needs of survivors in the next COVID-19 relief package.

Survivor stories and links to local news articles

If you can, it's important to personalize your advocacy. If you have information about your local community, that's great! If not, this [list](#) has links to local news stories from a number of cities and states nationwide.

You can also use one or more of the following stories to illustrate the impact of COVID-19 on survivors:

- “People who are already surviving through trauma and related mental health challenges post-sexual assault/violence are now also struggling to simply survive - pay rent, access food, manage living in close quarters with abusers. We are confronted with trying to meet

the needs of survivors in crisis on multiple levels.”

- A caller to the National Domestic Violence Hotline said they could not file paperwork to remove the abuser from their home, because courts are closed due to COVID-19. Another caller reported that their abuser was using isolation to keep the survivor from family and friends. The abuser had lost their job and got severance pay, but that money has been hidden away from the survivor. The abuser also recently purchased firearms, which gave the survivor even more anxiety.
- Nu, a Karen (Burmese) speaking advocate at a program that serves Asian and Pacific Islander Survivors in the southern part of the US, describes many of the challenges she and her program have in addressing the safety needs of survivors. One survivor she has been working with is isolated at home with her abusive husband after she lost her job as a dishwasher at a small Asian restaurant that has shut down due to the pandemic. Nu is the only English-speaking point of contact and has been trying to provide counseling support and safety planning. The survivor has been enduring increased beatings from her husband. She is also experiencing increased anxiety and struggling to manage the effects of PTSD that are increasing following her experiences of trauma, including sexual assault, during her migration experience. In addition, she has been afraid to leave the house, because she has heard reports of Asians being attacked because of the coronavirus through others in the community. Her husband has threatened her with deportation, which she is concerned about due to the stories that victims have been arrested at the courthouse.
- Imagine a Woman of Color who is a survivor of sexual assault and unable to wear a protective mask because the mask reignites the violence and abuse experienced during the assault. Imagine not being able to go anywhere safely during COVID—to get food, medicine, and basic needs for your family. Culturally specific Communities of Color agencies are providing support such as delivering groceries to these survivors. But they need your support to sustain their life saving efforts.
- In Pennsylvania, like many places around the country, children, families, and survivors of sexual assault struggle in isolation as COVID-19 persists. In some places, people do not even have access to 9-1-1 or internet, making service delivery impossible—this, while risk factors for sexual assault and abuse intensify. Risk factors such as isolation, stress, and economic insecurity all contribute to the perpetration of sexual assault against children and adults. We are seeing the dangers of this isolation in available statistics, with

fewer calls being made to ChildLine while protective adults are not seeing kids, yet an increase in calls for help from minors to hotlines throughout the U.S.

- From a program director in Ohio: “We are one of the largest independent rape crisis centers in the nation. Our funding is diverse and balanced between government sources and philanthropy. We entered the month of March in the strongest financial position in the history of our organization. Now, with the anticipated VOCA cuts at the end of this year, combined with the cancellation of our signature fundraising event, and our philanthropic partners diverting donations to COVID-19 emergency response, our financial well-being is in jeopardy. Without significant intervention, we will be dramatically reducing rape crisis services to our community (urban, suburban, rural).”
- Quotes from staff members from YWCA Pierce County in Tacoma, Washington:
 - Clients appreciate everything we are doing for them. A client who had been encountering every bump in the road imaginable told me I was the light at the end of her tunnel.
 - The future is uncertain and people are scared. Clients have expressed their appreciation that we are able to continue services and help navigate their legal cases so that they can protect themselves and their children. Home is not safe for everyone, especially survivors who are quarantined with their abusers.
 - However hard this pandemic is for us, it is extra difficult and complicated for the families we serve. Think about what staying home means for someone whose home is not safe. It's critical that we continue to be a place that families can turn to for support.

Links to supporting materials

If you are emailing or communicating on social media, please include one or more of the following links:

- Fact sheet about the connection between the need to increase deposits into to the Crime Victims Fund and COVID-19 (<https://tinyurl.com/yyejesgk>)
- The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence letter about the next COVID-19 package (<https://tinyurl.com/yvc2turt>)
- The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence statement about priorities for the 4th COVID package (<https://tinyurl.com/ybxyn3bf>)
- Fact sheet about culturally-specific services (<https://tinyurl.com/y7r8rj35>)
- Fact sheet about sexual assault (<https://tinyurl.com/y8re8rtf>)
- Fact sheet about the impact on Native communities (<https://tinyurl.com/y2dzjzy9>)
- Fact sheet about increased need (<https://tinyurl.com/ybopqzae>)

- Fact sheet about immigrant survivors (<https://tinyurl.com/yady7x6r>)
- Fact sheet about unemployment insurance (<https://tinyurl.com/y8d3m3mp>)

Sample social media posts

You can find Members' social media handles [HERE](#). Feel free to copy and paste or write your own social media posts. Don't forget to include the links above when it makes sense!

Twitter

Survivors of #domesticviolence & #sexualassault are particularly vulnerable in this #COVID19 crisis. [@YourSenator/@YourRep](#) – in the next relief bill, don't ignore the needs of survivors

In the next #COVID19 stimulus bill [@YourSenators/@YourRep](#) should dedicated funding for #sexualassault services, culturally-specific organizations, and Tribes and increase VOCA deposits. Details Here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybxyn3bf>

Facebook

Despite a known increase in interpersonal violence during the pandemic, Congress has yet to dedicate funding in relief bills for survivors of sexual assault, for community-based culturally-specific organizations serving survivors in Communities of Color, or for tribal victim service programs. We must ALL tell our Senators and Representatives they cannot ignore the needs of survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence anymore!

www.4vawa.org/ntf-action-alerts-and-news/2020/7/24/action-alert-dont-let-congress-ignore-survivors

Or

As Congress takes small steps to reform policing, they should not forget that racism is part of all of our institutions, as amply demonstrated by the disparate impact of COVID-19 on Black communities, including on Black survivors, and on other Communities of Color. NONE of the COVID-19 packages has **provided funding for culturally-specific community-based organizations that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services**. This is unacceptable. In the next stimulus bill the Senate must:

- 1) Prevent drastic cuts to victim services funding that would compromise programs' ability to meet the increased need caused by COVID-19 without spending taxpayer money by [increasing deposits](#) into the Crime Victims Fund and by temporarily waiving match requirements for Victims of Crime Act victim assistance grants.

- 2) Provide [dedicated funding](#) for culturally-specific organizations that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- 3) Address the needs of survivors by funding [sexual assault services](#);
- 4) Provide funding for tribal governments to provide domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- 5) Provide more funding for domestic and sexual violence programs through a VAWA formula grant directly to victim service programs;
- 6) Ensure that access to safety for [immigrant survivors](#) is not compromised by immigration enforcement;
- 7) Allow states to make survivors eligible for [unemployment insurance](#) if they leave their jobs due to domestic or sexual violence.