

**New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault Testimony before the
Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on the Fiscal Year 2008
– 2009 New Jersey State Budget**

Addressed to:
The Honorable Barbara Buono, Chair
Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee

On behalf of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Jennifer Nix
Director of Government and Policy Affairs
2333 Whitehorse-Mercerville Rd., Suite J
Trenton, NJ 08619

609-631-4450 ex 204
609-631-4453 (fax)
jnix@njcasa.org

March 25, 2008

Good morning Chairwoman Buono and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me time to speak.

My name is Jennifer Nix and I am the Director of Government and Policy Affairs for the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault. NJCASA represents the 21 county-based sexual violence programs in New Jersey, plus the Sexual Assault Services and Crime Victim Assistance program at Rutgers University. The sexual violence programs in New Jersey provide a variety of services to survivors of sexual assault, including:

- 24-hour crisis response of a Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate. A Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate is a specially trained advocate whose interactions with a client are protected by legal confidentiality.
- 24-hour hotline.
- Individual counseling for survivors and significant others as well as group counseling
- Response to Sexual Assault Response Team activation. These teams are made up of law enforcement, a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner and a Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate and respond to survivors who need forensic exams.
- Legal, medical, and systems advocacy.
- Information and referral services.
- Community education and prevention work.

Our member programs operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, serving survivors of sexual assault and their loved ones. In 2006, our programs provided counseling to 3,245 survivors, answered calls from 11,878 survivors and 13,339 loved ones and accompanied 2253 survivors to medical/ forensic exams, police investigations or court appearances.

Advocates answer the phone at all hours to listen to men and women talk about some of the most intimate and traumatic events of their lives. They get up in the middle of the night to meet survivors at hospitals and police stations, so that no survivor is forced to go through the experience alone. They counsel people who were assaulted twenty years ago and people who were assaulted twenty minutes ago. And for every survivor, family member, or friend who calls a sexual violence program, trained sexual violence advocates are there to listen, to help, and most importantly to believe.

What is most amazing about these services is how little money funds these important services. In 2007, New Jersey provided \$1 million for sexual violence programs, divided up between the 22 programs. In 2007, there was a one time allocation of funds from the Governor's Grant-in-Aid of \$1.5 million through the Division of Criminal Justice, which will be split between domestic violence services and sexual violence services. Other funding comes from the federal government via Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). VAWA and VOCA funds have decreased or remained stagnant over the past few years and the sexual violence programs have had to compete with programs that serve other populations. As a result, sexual violence programs collectively received less than \$1 million from VAWA and VOCA funds in 2007. The CDC has been directing its funds towards prevention of sexual violence and has drastically decreased how much of its funds can be used for direct services.

The only sure source of funding for sexual violence programs is the \$1 million line item through the Department of Community Affairs (pD63), which is divided up between all 22 programs. This means less than \$45,000 per program. This doesn't even cover one full time

staff person. In many counties, the bulk of the after-hours hotline work is done by a very committed group of volunteers, supervised by paid staff who also do counseling, training and educational programs, and who staff the hotline during the day. The funding that actually goes to the sexual violence programs is far below what the programs actually need. NJCASA estimates that to fund the most basic services of the state sexual violence programs in New Jersey would cost about \$157,000 per program. This would include paying for a hotline, one full time staff member, and one part time staff member.

Basic Services Per County Program

❖ 24-hour Hotline (365 x \$7.12x24) + 15% fringe	=	\$71,726.88
❖ 1 Full-time Caseworker @ \$45,000 + 25% fringe	=	\$56,250.00
❖ 1 Half-time Caseworker @ \$25,000 + 15% fringe	=	\$28,750.00
	Total	= \$156,726.88

Our programs are funded at far less than \$156,726 per year through federal and state money.

Because federal sources of funds are drying up and the sources that are left are unpredictable, programs have had to let go of staff and cut back on services. One county had to let go two of its three staff members when the program did not receive one federal grant. A few weeks later, it received funding through the Governor's Grant-in-Aid for one of those positions. However, the program cannot hire back the staff members that it laid off and their knowledge and experience is lost to the organization and to survivors in New Jersey. Many programs have had to cut back on services by dropping services such as group counseling or by relying more on volunteers for hotline staffing, crisis counseling, and Sexual Assault Response Team participation.

We are part of the social safety net. The vast majority of these cases never get to the police or the prosecutor. In many cases, the advocate on the other end of the phone is the first person to even hear the words "I was raped" by the survivor on the other end of the line. We are part of the safety net through our counseling and support for survivors who don't know where else to turn. But our part of the safety net is close to fraying as our programs' sources of funding dwindle and disappear.

In past years we have asked that the line item funding our programs be increased to \$2 million dollars. A few years ago, you did increase it, from \$500,000 to the \$1 million we have today, which we deeply appreciated. Now we are asking to maintain the \$1 million line item and look to increase it as our federal funds decrease.

Thank you for your time and attention.