



WASHINGTON STATE  
WOMEN'S COMMISSION

# SAFETY AND STABILITY

Continuing State  
Funding for  
Crime Victims in  
Washington  
State

*November 2025 -  
January 2026*

20

26

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victim services across our state are in a funding crisis. The state's federal award through the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA), fell 76% between 2018 and 2024 – dropping from \$74.7 million to \$17.86 million (Office of Crime Victims Advocacy [OCVA], [2025](#)). Without state appropriations, programs could face further reductions and be forced to lay off more staff, turn away more crime victims, or close their doors for good. Washington legislators face a critical decision: whether to continue to backfill federal cuts with state investments in victim services or allow further erosion of the safety net.

Victim advocacy and support services are a cornerstone of Washington State's response to domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and trafficking. These services, including 24/7 crisis lines, emergency shelter, transitional housing, civil legal aid, mental health counseling, and long-term advocacy, are not ancillary supports. They save lives that protect crime victims, stabilize communities, and prevent far more costly state intervention downstream.

The Washington State Women's Commission (WSWC) was created to elevate the lived experiences of women and girls to inform public policy. From November 2025 – January 2026, WSWC's Safety Committee conducted a statewide survey and in-depth interviews to examine how victim services affect the safety, stability, and long-term outcomes of crime victims, and what is at stake if funding is reduced. Committee members contacted survey respondents through outreach to more than 100 service providers, shelters, advocacy groups, and law enforcement contacts.

Survey responses consistently show that crime victims rely on services well beyond the moment of crisis. Advocacy (79%), civil legal assistance (65%), housing or shelter (50%), mental health services (45%), and crisis lines (36%) were cited as critical to survival and recovery. Crime victims and advocates alike warned that funding cuts would result in missed crisis calls, reduced shelter capacity, increased advocate caseloads, and ultimately higher costs to the state through emergency healthcare, law enforcement response, child welfare involvement, and lost economic productivity.

Demographic analysis highlights why these services are especially vital. Women, people of color, LGBTQ+ crime victims, young adults, and survivors in rural counties experience both higher rates of violence and greater barriers to accessing help. Without stable state funding, these disparities will widen.

Washington has invested significantly in recent years in strengthening victim protections, modernizing civil protection orders, improving trauma-informed responses, and expanding rights of crime victims. These legislative advances depend on a functioning service network. Failing to address the federal funding reductions will result in funding cuts that undermine the very systems the Legislature has worked to build.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the Legislature to reaffirm Washington's commitment to crime victims by:

1. Continuing state funding levels for victim advocacy and support services.
2. Stabilizing funding to offset federal reductions.
3. Protecting 24/7 crisis response and advocacy capacity statewide.
4. Investing in civil legal aid, housing, and trauma-informed mental health services.

Continuing state funding for victim services is fiscally responsible, evidence-based, and aligned with Washington's values. It reflects Washington's values as a survivor-centered state and aligns directly with the mission of the Washington State Women's Commission to elevate community needs and advance gender justice.

Cutting these services would place crime victims at greater risk and undermine decades of progress. Legislators have a clear opportunity in the upcoming biennial budget to preserve lifesaving services and uphold Washington's commitment to safety, dignity, and justice for crime victims.

# METHODOLOGY

This report draws on three primary sources of information:

Statewide Survey: The Women’s Commission collected survey responses from survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking, community advocates, and individuals supporting crime victims. Findings are drawn from a small sample size. Responses and interviews represent a snapshot into the experiences of survivors and those that support them, including from rural, suburban, and urban areas. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions regarding the impact of victim services and the anticipated consequences of funding cuts. Respondents self-identified by age range, gender, and race. Percentages are reported to contextualize findings and highlight disparities while maintaining confidentiality.

In-Depth Interviews: Anonymized interviews were conducted to capture both survivor and community advocate perspectives, providing narrative depth and illustrate systemic impacts that are difficult to capture through survey data alone. All quotations are anonymized and attributed as either “Survivor” or “Community Advocate.”

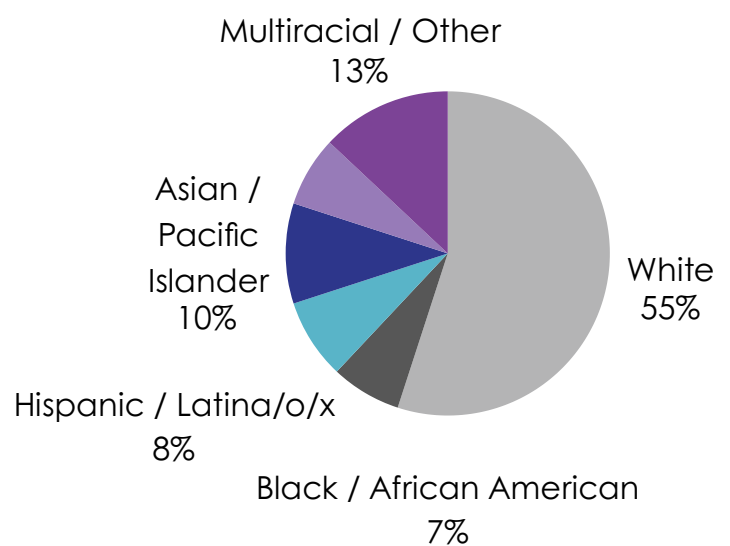
Secondary Data Review: This report incorporates empirical research and administrative data from the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OVCA), Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

# DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

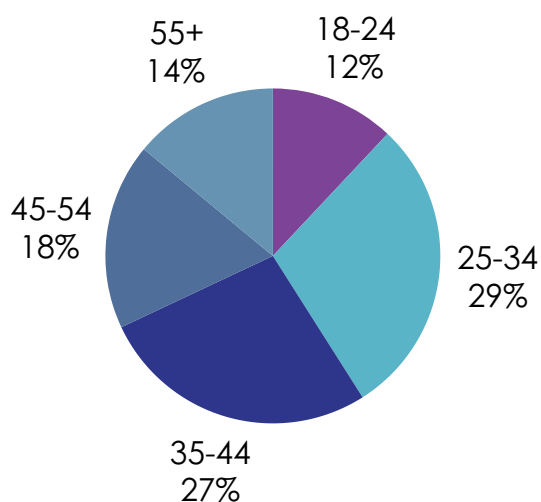
Survey respondents reflected a broad cross-section of Washington residents impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking.

These demographics matter. National and state data consistently show that women, Native American and Black women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and young adults experience disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence, while also facing systemic barriers to accessing services, including discrimination, language access issues, distrust of systems, and geographic isolation.

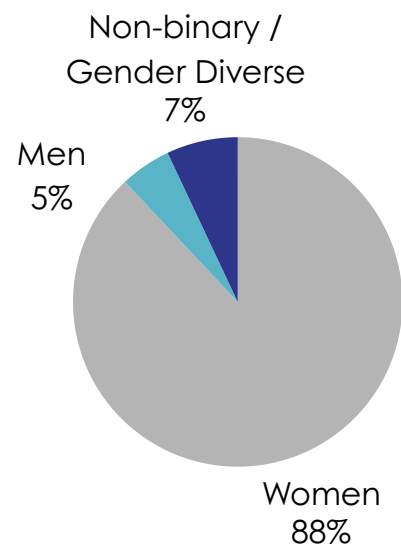
## Race and Ethnicity



## Age



## Gender



# KEY FINDINGS

The following services were cited as critical to survival and recovery.

- 79% of respondents cited advocacy services as essential to safety and stability.
- 65% cited civil legal assistance, including protection orders and custody support.
- 50% identified housing or shelter as critical to escaping abuse.
- 45% cited mental health or counseling services.
- 36% emphasized the importance of 24/7 crisis lines or immediate response.
- A majority of respondents warned that funding reductions would directly endanger survivors and increase long-term public costs.

**“If no one had answered the phone, I don’t know where I would be.”**

**— Survivor**

## Victim Services as Lifesaving Infrastructure

Crime victims repeatedly described victim services as the difference between life and death. Crisis lines staffed by trained advocates provide immediate, judgment-free support during moments of acute danger, despair, or isolation.

Community advocates emphasized that survivors often reach out during narrow windows of opportunity. Missing a call, closing a shelter bed, or delaying response can have irreversible consequences.

**If a survivor reaches out, and no one answers, the opportunity for safety can be lost.”**

**— Community Advocate**

## Civil Legal Aid: Navigating Complex Legal Systems

Civil legal aid emerged as one of the most critical, and complex, needs for crime victims. Respondents described navigating protection orders, family law, housing law, employment rights, immigration relief, and public benefits, often simultaneously.

This aligns with research by the Office of Civil Legal Aid which found on average survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault experience 18-19 legal issues as a result of the harm (Office of Civil Legal Aid [OCLA], 2015).

# KEY FINDINGS

Legal needs commonly included:

- Civil protection orders and renewals
- Child custody and visitation disputes
- Divorce and property division
- Housing instability and eviction defense
- Employment retaliation
- Immigration relief for survivors
- Crime victim compensation

Advocates and legal aid attorneys ensure crime victims understand their rights and are not bullied or coerced out of protection.

**“The court system is confusing and overwhelming. Without an attorney explaining my options, I would have made mistakes that hurt my case.”**  
— Survivor

## Housing and Shelter as a Foundation for Safety

Half of respondents identified housing or shelter as essential. Without access to safe housing, crime victims face untenable choices between homelessness and returning to abuse.

In rural counties, a single shelter may serve an entire region. In urban areas, shelters are frequently full, with waitlists that delay safety.

**“I couldn’t leave until I knew my child and I had somewhere safe to go.”**  
— Survivor

## Mental Health and Healing

Nearly half of respondents cited mental health services as critical. Trauma from domestic violence and sexual assault affects survivors’ ability to work, parent, and engage with systems.

Access to trauma-informed therapy reduces long-term healthcare costs and improves economic stability. Community advocates described the tangible impacts of funding instability: layoffs, increased caseloads, reduced shelter capacity, and the risk of eliminating 24-hour response.

## Long-Term Safety and Stability

Survey responses make clear that victim services are not short-term interventions. Crime victims often need support years after leaving an abusive relationship, particularly when abuse continues through stalking, harassment, or litigation. Protection orders may need renewal years later; trauma may resurface; abusers may reappear.

Advocates help crime victims plan for safety over time, anticipate risks, and rebuild stability.

# DISPARITIES AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Respondents from marginalized communities described additional barriers, including language access, fear of law enforcement, and lack of culturally responsive services.

**“I didn’t think services were meant for someone like me.”**

— Survivor

These barriers underscore the need for stable funding to support outreach, language access services, and culturally specific programs.

## Rural Counties and Overburdened Urban Systems

VOCA funding reductions have already resulted in service cuts across Washington, particularly in rural counties where a single organization may serve an entire region, where its advocates may be the only point of contact available 24/7 (Turner, 2026). Crime victims often have no alternative provider if services are reduced. Geographic isolation, limited transportation, and sparse law enforcement coverage make advocacy services even more critical. Cuts can eliminate entire services.

Urban systems face different challenges: overwhelming demand, long waitlists, and full shelters. Funding cuts exacerbate these pressures, leaving crime victims with fewer options despite higher population density. High volume strains capacity.

**“Victim support is easy to forget when it is there. So much happens behind the scenes and in the background. But when it is gone, you will see impacts immediately.”**

— Community Advocate

## County and Municipal Funding Gaps

Survey respondents and advocates consistently noted that most victim service agencies receive little to no municipal or county funding. State funding is the primary stabilizer, especially as federal funds decline. Without it, agencies are forced to make cuts that ripple across coordinated community responses.

# THE COST OF INACTION

## Washington Legislative Initiatives Supporting Crime Victims

In recent years, Washington has enacted significant legislation to strengthen crime victim protections and trauma-informed systems, including:

- Modernization of civil protection order statutes to improve accessibility and enforcement
- Expansion of victim rights within the criminal legal system
- Requirements for trauma-informed training for investigators and professionals
- Investments to improve rape kit testing and reduce backlogs
- Reforms to enhance crime victim privacy and safety

These advances depend on a functioning advocacy and service infrastructure. Without funding, legislative intent cannot be realized.

**“Cutting these services doesn’t save money. It just moves the cost and the harm elsewhere.”**

**— Community Advocate**

## The Cost of Inaction

Failing to continue state funding for victim services shifts costs elsewhere. Crime victims without support are more likely to rely on emergency healthcare, law enforcement, and child welfare systems.

- Studies show that preventative services reduce downstream public expenditures (Arachchige Dona et al., [2025](#)).
- Department of Justice (DOJ) research demonstrates that advocacy increases survivor safety and cooperation with legal systems (DOJ, [2024](#)).
- The CDC estimated in 2003 that intimate partner violence costs the U.S. exceeded \$8.3 billion annually in medical expenses and lost productivity, costs that have since inflated, and increase when crime victims lack access to early intervention and support services (Max et al., [2004](#)).

Early intervention through advocacy reduces these downstream costs and improves outcomes.

# CONCLUSION

The findings are clear. Crime victims rely on victim services not only in moments of immediate crisis, but often years later as abuse resurfaces through stalking, harassment, or custody disputes. Advocates play a unique role in helping crime victims navigate complex systems, including courts, housing, healthcare, and public benefits, while prioritizing survivor autonomy and safety.

Victim services are essential public safety infrastructure. They save lives and reduce long-term costs. Washington has built a survivor-centered framework grounded in dignity, autonomy, and safety. Allowing this framework to erode would undermine the state's values and place crime victims at unacceptable risk.

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