



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

**The National
Advocacy Center**

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
and Science
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
and Science
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

CC: All Subcommittee members

June 20, 2006

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski:

We are writing on behalf of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to express our concern about proposed funding levels for critical programs in the Senate Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations bill, particularly funding for the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), Title V Local Delinquency Program, Delinquency Prevention Block Grant (DPBG) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and Good Shepherd spirituality, the National Advocacy Center believes that all budget decisions should be evaluated based on how they impact the most vulnerable in our society. Unfortunately, the proposed funding levels for juvenile justice and VAWA programs demonstrate that providing underserved youth with opportunities, preventing youth from engaging in behavior that compromises their own and their community's safety, and supporting efforts to end domestic violence are not a priority. The National Advocacy Center urges you to support increased investments in these important programs following the recommendations we outline below.

Throughout the United States the Sisters of the Good Shepherd support social service agencies, some of which receive funding from JABG, Title V and DPBG. Cuts to these programs severely compromise the invaluable services that Good Shepherd agencies and other organizations provide to at-risk youth. The Good Shepherd Mediation Program in Philadelphia is particularly affected by the cuts to JABG, which it has used in the past to fund its Summary Offender Diversion Program (SODP) for first-time youth offenders. This program trains first-time offenders in conflict resolution, anger management and communication and decision making skills and has been touted as a success by juvenile offenders. Participants echo first-time offender Rosa's reflections on the program:

“What I found most useful is when we talked about positive/negative actions, consequences, control, and pressure. I think the class was very useful. It helped me understand why stealing is wrong, what causes stealing, [and] I also know I won't EVER steal again.”

Last year Good Shepherd Mediation Program lost \$120,000 due to cuts to JABG and it currently receives no JABG funding for the program. While Good Shepherd Mediation program has been able to maintain the Summary Offender Diversion Program, they have had to cut staff, reduce the number of youth served, and the youth that do participate must pay. The cuts to JABG clearly limit the number of at-risk youth that Good Shepherd Mediation Program can reach, which in turn affects the safety of the broader Philadelphia community. We also know that there are similar programs across the country facing the same funding difficulties because of JABG cutbacks.

Along with other juvenile justice advocates, the National Advocacy Center requests that the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) be funded at \$250 million. From 1998, when JABG was created, until 2002, it was funded at around \$250 million. However, it has steadily decreased over the years from \$190 million in 2003, to \$60 million in 2004, to \$54.6 million in 2005 and \$50 million for 2006. These cuts have meant that fewer resources are available to establish and maintain programs to assess and provide for the wide range of needs of juvenile offenders.

The National Advocacy Center also recommends additional funding for the Title V Local Delinquency Prevention Program, the only federal funding source whose sole purpose is to prevent youth crime and violence. It funds community-based prevention programs to reach youth before they make the wrong choices and its programs include after-school activities, mentoring and tutoring programs, and substance abuse, gang and drop-out prevention. In Buchanan County, Missouri, Title V has funded activities such as tutoring, technology training and recreational activities before school; peer relations groups, conflict resolution and drug awareness classes during school, and mentoring and tutoring after school. The middle school that received Title V funding for these programs saw reductions in juvenile crime and vandalism; a decrease in tardiness and truancy; and a rise in grades. Title V programs are necessary to enhance public safety and support positive youth development, yet prevention programs are often underfunded. In 2002, Title V was funded at \$95 million; in 2005, the funding dropped to \$79 million, and, in 2006, it was further decreased to \$65 million, \$60 million of which was earmarked for purposes other than those of the program. We urge the committee to restore Title V funding to 2002 levels.

In addition, the National Advocacy Center urges full funding for the Delinquency Prevention Block Grant (DPBG) and for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The DPBG was created in 2002 to provide additional resources to prevent and reduce juvenile crime, but has not been funded for the last three years. Given other cutbacks, DPBG funds are especially critical at this time. Full funding for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is also needed to effectively implement all of the programs we have mentioned.

Finally, the National Advocacy Center requests that all existing and new VAWA programs be fully funded. In 1994 Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act and it was reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. The 2005 reauthorization extended existing programs and created new ones to target Native Americans, youth and victims of sexual violence. The result is an effective combination of prevention and intervention services that address the needs of women, men and children. Good Shepherd agencies, such as the domestic violence shelters in Los Angeles and Chicago, help survivors of domestic violence heal and move on with their lives with support from VAWA services. The Los Angeles shelter has an extremely high success rate for the domestic violence victims they serve – 90% of the families who complete the program at the shelter go on to lead healthy and violence-free lives, in part because of the VAWA services available to them.

Despite the success and importance of VAWA programs, the President's budget falls short and fails to include funding for any of the newly authorized VAWA programs. Full funding of these programs is needed to ensure that domestic violence survivors and communities have access to prevention programs, sexual assault services, long term housing, programs for Native American women and children, teen services and educational resources to help end domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence.

While the National Advocacy Center understands the current budgetary constraints, we believe that it is critical that programs that help prevent violence, support positive alternatives for youth, and help survivors of violence heal receive adequate funding. We hope you will support our recommendations for funding levels for these programs and look forward to working with you to increase investments violence prevention and in opportunity for all.

Sincerely,

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