

# 2022 Legislative Agenda

Assisting and protecting survivors

## Washington Sexual Assault Working Group



# Victims must be a priority

Last year, more than 20,000 survivors of sexual assault were assisted by one of Washington's 63 Community Sexual Assault Programs (CSAP's) and other organizations assisting victims. That assistance is possible because Washington has long been a leader in responding to sexual violence.

In the 25 years since a first-of-its-kind state plan for statewide victim services was implemented, we have passed new laws and expanded services across the state that reflect our growing understanding and recognition of the pervasiveness and impact of sexual violence.

*We now know that with immediate, trauma-informed support, victim healing and recovery is possible.*

And that understanding has informed critical victim safety, protection, support and prevention policies in the last few years.

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***"It took four years to go through trial...that was before COVID. I worked with KCSARC for a very long time. I don't know where I would have gotten those updates from if it wasn't my advocate. There are ways that the system is broken; the one thing that was consistent for me was that my advocate always had the answer."***

—Alex, survivor

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***"I can't imagine how anyone could start to begin to rebuild their lives without an organization such as Tri-City SARC. Sexual assault resource centers are our strongest voice when we are strangled with fear. They are our crutch when we are physically weakened, and they are our humanity when we are left devastated and destroyed."***

—Elizabeth, survivor

Along with finally eliminating the shameful rape kit backlog, passage of HB 1109 in 2021 reinforced a victim's right to support in their community, further fulfilling our state constitutional guarantee of "due dignity and respect" in granting fundamental rights to victims who report.

**But there remains more to do.**

We know many survivors of sexual assault continue to face systemic and cultural barriers to support and protection here in Washington state. Victims of a crime the Legislature calls "the most heinous crime against another person short of murder" deserve better.

**A working group of community-based sexual assault organizations is calling on the legislature to further strengthen victim resources and consider the impact on victims in decisions aimed toward improving equity in our criminal legal system. These include:**

## **Stabilizing supportive resources**

All community-based sexual assault programs are stretched beyond capacity, and doing more with fewer resources.

Organizations are reporting extensive wait lists, while caseloads are 20% over target — challenging our ability to maintain staff.

Further complicating this situation is the fact that the state has relied on unstable federal funding for 65% of the annual costs of providing services victims of sexual assault. And this significant source of federal funding has been shrinking, undercutting OCVA's ability to fund programs. The Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) Crime Victims Fund has shrunk 67% in the past 3 years, leaving Washington state services in serious peril.

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***VOCA has declined steadily every year for the past three years, which has led to reductions in VOCA grants for states. This then gets passed on to local programs.***

—Susan Marks, WCSAP

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***"The number of children who were sexually exploited increased 196% after an entire year of the pandemic. These traumatized children will require continued and consistent services in order to heal."***

— JoDee Garretson, Support Advocacy & Resource Center, Tri-Cities

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***"In the past couple years we have noted an increase in the needs of our clients who cannot find adequate support due to closures and capacity shortages in other social services. We operate a therapy program, and due to the general increased need for mental health services, our waitlist has steadily grown longer. Where it used to be 2 to 3 weeks, it's now 2 to 3 months."***

— Sarah Ciambrone, Rebuilding HOPE!, the Sexual Assault Center for Pierce County

## Assisting and protecting survivors

### ▶ Ensuring equitable access to forensic exams

The promise of an accessible Sexual Assault Forensic Exam for survivors at hospitals throughout the state depends on more trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners.

### ▶ Protecting victims and preventing further harm

Preventing further harm requires a multi-tiered effort, including further work on civil Protection Orders and effective responses to serious sexual assault committed by and against young people.

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*“Victims are having to travel long distances for forensic exams, resulting in some not seeking those services or getting inadequate services because of insufficiently trained medical providers.”*

— Laura Merchant, Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center

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*“For this survivor, our team was able to assist in navigating the District Court and Superior Court processes that have different hours of operation, different types of protection orders, and different paperwork even for the same types of protection orders.”*

— Millini Goodman, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

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### For more information:

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