



April 21, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As members of the National Hotline Consortium, a group of leading national victim service and crisis intervention hotlines, we write to request that operational support for the victim services we provide be included in the upcoming COVID IV stimulus package.

The COVID-19 crisis is having significant effects on the safety and mental health of families and children, and our organizations are serving on the frontline to combat these impacts.

Collectively, we employ hundreds of mental health, crisis intervention, administrative workers and a handful of lawyers through our hotlines. We provide critical and timely support and resources to victims and survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, runaway and homeless youth, tribal youth and adults and members of the LGBTQ community. Hundreds of thousands of people in the United States rely on our services every month.

COVID-19 is impacting our organizations and the people we serve in unique and challenging ways. Due to social distancing directives and shelter-in-place orders, victims have lost most of their person-to-person support. The mandated reporter structure in place to protect children from abuse has all but collapsed: kids are cut off from non-family caregivers and the threshold for deploying officials to do investigations and welfare checks in homes has increased significantly. In many cases, hotlines are the sole resource that people have in this time of crisis. Many of our hotlines provide text, email and chat capabilities, which offer victims more privacy to safely seek help while living with their abuser.

Additionally, the response to COVID-19 will have severe consequences for our organizations. We are experiencing increasing requests for assistance and conversations are increasing in complexity and length. With typical resources for survivors severely limited in this time of crisis, our staff is experiencing

significant emotional and psychological stress even as they provide emotional support to victims. In most cases, our hotlines are operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week through remote operations. The staff are doing this work in their homes, without the traditional wellness resources. They will be doing this work while caring for their own families, and perhaps also becoming ill. While we cannot create more in-person resources during this time, we must ensure that our organizations are able to handle the surge of outreach with additional support for well trained, emotionally and physically healthy staff.

Our consortia members are working together to increase communication within the hotline community and to share best practices on onboarding and training staff remotely and new ways to conduct outreach to victims in this new and uncertain time. All of this takes substantial time and effort beyond current capacities. In addition, we anticipate further requests for support when shelter-in-place orders are no longer active and individuals impacted by abuse have greater ability to seek outside support. This increased call volume, need for additional staff, strain on existing staff, and urgent need to increase coordination is all coming at a time when our fundraising has decreased dramatically.

The examples below show that there is an increased need for the services that the consortium members provide. With limited social contact and many people confined to their homes, we may be the first and sometimes only place they can turn. Investing in additional staff, specialized outreach, and mechanisms to share what we learn is the best way to ensure continuous support during this time of crisis. The local victim services to which we refer many survivors and their loved ones are also responding to more complex requests in a changed world and require substantial supplemental resources to meet victims' needs.

It is our hope that Congress will act in the upcoming COVID IV stimulus bill to ensure that victims of abuse can receive the support they desperately need by providing an additional \$1,000,000 per hotline in funding to our hotlines.

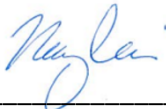
Thank you for your continued support for victims of crime.

Sincerely,

Kristen K. Douglas

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National Child Abuse Hotline/ Childhelp



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National Human Trafficking Hotline/ Polaris



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National Sexual Assault Hotline/ RAINN



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National Runaway Safeline



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Crisis Text Line



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National Domestic Violence Hotline



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Victim Connect/ National Center for  
Victims of Crime



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Pathways To Safety International



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WomensLaw Email Hotline/  
National Network to End Domestic Violence



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StrongHearts Native Helpline

CC: Vice President Mike Pence

CC: Chair and Ranking Members of House and Senate Labor-HHS-Education and Commerce,  
Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittees

## IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON CRISIS HOTLINES

**The National Child Abuse Hotline** is seeing a significant increase in volume with issues related to COVID-19. Youth feeling trapped in their home with abusive caregivers with little to no outside support and contact, college students struggling with having to suddenly come home to abusive environments, adult survivors of abuse have decreased access to their regular service providers, custody proceedings being put on hold, and an overall sense of increased anxiety from all ages.

**RAINN** is seeing an increase in the number of minors accessing the National Sexual Assault Hotline's online hotline. These children are now quarantined with their abusers and are reporting that their traditional support network has disappeared due to school closures. They report both an escalation in the frequency and type of abuse. Once shelter-in-place restrictions begin to ease, and victims have the privacy to reach out for support without the knowledge of their abuser, we anticipate a significant increase in usage of the National Sexual Assault Hotline.

The **National Runaway Safeline (NRS)** is experiencing a significant increase across all of its crisis contact platforms (hotline, live chat services, emails and on-line forum). NRS has seen an increase of 3X the number of overall crisis contacts received during March 2020 versus March 2019. The range of issues youth are experiencing include: youth in need of shelter along with limited to no availability of shelter resources; limited to no access to transportation to safe housing and shelter; heightened anxiety and limited access to support systems at schools, drop-in centers, case management and other resources; having to remain at home or their current living arrangement with an abuser or other potentially unsafe living situation; increase in suicide related contacts; and an overall increase in the level of intensity and length of time needed for each crisis connection.

At the **National Center for Victims of Crimes (NCVC)**, which leads the National Hotline Consortium and runs the VictimConnect Resource Center, which provides services to all individuals who are survivors of crime, has found that since COVID-19, resources around the nation have been limited and the individuals calling are feeling lost and isolated and have limited face-to-face resources to turn to other than national hotlines like the ones in the consortium.

At the **National Domestic Violence Hotline**, we are anticipating a spike in contacts from survivors once shelter in place orders have been lifted. Since we first began tracking COVID-19 cases, we have received 2,345 inquiries related to how the pandemic is compounding survivors' ability to access safety. Thematically, the biggest concerns we have heard from survivors have been around access to emergency housing, access to financial resources due to job loss, safety planning and legal support around child custody and visitation, challenges around filing for police reports, and increased threats around strangulation. While the National Domestic Violence received support from the CARES Act, 25% of which will be sub-granted to StrongHearts Native Helpline, we would like to request additional funding to support our continued operations, technology needs, and to allow us to hire additional staff.

**The Polaris-operated National Human Trafficking Hotline** has seen an increase in total calls since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis and continues to provide 24/7 support to victims and survivors through fully remote operations. However, as more states issue stay-at-home orders it has become increasingly challenging to connect victims with in-person resources in their communities. Many shelters are no longer accepting new clients or have limited space as a result of the crisis so Trafficking Hotline staff are coordinating safety planning efforts and other personalized solutions with victims who are experiencing additional challenges exiting trafficking situations. Many law enforcement agencies across the country are limiting their responses to urgent and dangerous situations so longer term operations or investigations are lower priority, emboldening exploiters. The Trafficking Hotline anticipates that individuals who are already vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking will become more vulnerable as wages, housing, and worker protection are negatively impacted.

**Pathways To Safety International** is experiencing increasingly desperate communications from American victims of gender based violence abroad. These victims are unable to leave their homes, and, if they are, are unable to return to the USA for safety. Gender based violence agencies and shelters abroad are overwhelmed and do not have the capacity to serve their own citizens never mind foreign nationals as domestic violence increases globally. Consequently, American victims trapped abroad are experiencing ever increasing violence. The need to continue to provide and increase Pathways' global services to the millions of Americans living, traveling and now stuck abroad is critical.

**WomensLaw Email Hotline, a project of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)**, is the first and longest-running national email hotline of its kind for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The Email Hotline is unique in that it is completely staffed by attorneys who provide legal information to almost 6,000 victims and their loved ones each year in English and Spanish. Notably, users can remain anonymous and have the option to create a secure account on the WomensLaw.org platform with a login and password if email is not a safe option for them. WomensLaw currently has to close periodically so that staff have the opportunity to respond to the influx of people seeking information (within the last three months, for example, the Email Hotline was closed 43% of the time). WomensLaw anticipates an increased need during the current crisis. Due to social distancing and stay-at-home directives, people cannot go to local legal services offices to ask questions and most of these offices are not set up to answer questions confidentially, anonymously, and securely via email. Additional funding for WomensLaw would allow us to keep the Email Hotline open for longer periods of time and ensure that victims, advocates, and their loved ones can always receive the timely legal information that they are seeking.

**Crisis Text Line**, a crisis line which takes conversations with texters via SMS messaging and Facebook messenger, is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization headquartered in New York, with crisis counseling services that are available for free, 24/7, in any area code in the United States, in addition to certain international reach. Its volunteer Crisis Counselors (each of which undergoes rigorous training based upon best practices in the industry), overseen by trained staff who are mental health professionals, interact with any texter who opts in by contacting

the organization by texting to the 741741 short code or via Facebook Messenger. Crisis Text Line does not use a regional model, but rather a speed-based model whereby any available Crisis Counselor nationwide can connect remotely through Crisis Text Line's secure platform with a texter in need regardless of the texter's location, queued in order of the severity of the texter's crisis. The organization has seen a 40% increase in conversation volume during the COVID-19 pandemic (particularly for crises involving anxiety, isolation, financial stress, grief, and domestic violence), and has added staff and volunteers to meet the demand and expand.