

- Surge of **15,700 Children in Need** of Children Advocacy Centers (CAC)
- **Multi-Disciplinary Teams Defunded**
- CAC Services **Cut by More Than \$7.1 Million**

Covid-19 and Child Abuse in Ohio



- Throughout 2020 **children** have had **less contact with mandated reporters** leaving children **more vulnerable** to abuse.
- As restrictions ease, CACs are seeing both **increased cases and severity of cases**. Now more than ever before, **children need CAC services**.

More Children Isolated, Endangered, and In Need



- **Ohio CACs** partner with **local law enforcement, prosecutors, and child protection services** to **serve and protect 11,700 children**.
- Based on current referral rates **we project an additional 4,000 children** in need of services **this year alone**.

The Pandemic Shutdown, Fundraising and the Economy (**\$2.9M LOST**)



- Cases are expected to **continue surging** as **new variants** of the virus emerge.
- **Due to restrictions** CACs have been **unable to engage in fundraising events** that support up to **30% of total services**.
- **Due to the economic impacts of shutdowns** CACs have seen **reduced funding** from corporations, foundations, and donations. (**\$2.9 Million Loss**)

Making It Worse: VOCA Cuts During the Pandemic (**\$4.2M LOST**)



- **VOCA** funding directly **supports Mental Health, Medical, Victim Advocacy, and Forensic Interviewing**. There has been a **70% cut in VOCA** funding during the past 3 Years with **CACs losing more than \$4.2M**.
- On July 20, the United States Senate passed the Victim of Crimes Act funding bill to mandate restoring money allocated to victim services organizations. While this is excellent news, **it will be at least 2 years until annual funding levels are restored**. *This passage doesn't help Ohio now with pandemic-related expenses to care for our children.*



ARPA Request

\$7.1 Million from the American Rescue Plan Funds can **save this critical CAC lifeline for Ohio's Children**.

Follow the state of Illinois' example of supporting CACs through ARPA dollars.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON OHIO CACS' ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The Ohio Network of Children's Advocacy Centers (ONCAC) is the statewide association representing the Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) throughout Ohio.

Children's Advocacy Centers are child-focused centers that coordinate the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child sexual abuse while helping abused children heal. CACs emphasize the coordination of investigation and intervention services by bringing together professionals and agencies as a multidisciplinary team to create a child-focused approach to child sexual abuse cases. CACs are effective, hold offenders accountable, help child victims heal, and promote best practice by all of our multidisciplinary team members. In addition, CACs are tasked with providing training and child sexual abuse prevention education to members of their local communities.

All 50 states including Ohio have passed legislation requiring government agencies to collaborate on cases of child sexual abuse and CACs are the key component to ensuring ongoing and effective collaboration. **Section 2151.421 and 2151.428 of the Ohio Revised Code states that if there is a children's advocacy center in a jurisdiction, it should be used for the purpose of coordinating and providing the necessary services for child sexual abuse reports. Despite these ORC sections, there is no funding provided by the State of Ohio to ensure that a children's advocacy center is available to be utilized.**

Children's Advocacy Centers provide "essential" services to children and families coping with child sexual abuse. Across Ohio all CACs remained open during the pandemic to provide interviews, advocacy, and counseling to those children and families who disclosed abuse. They adapted their services to support families in innovative ways ensuring that the children and families received the help they needed. CACs continue to help families respond, adapt, and recover from the combined effects of COVID and child abuse.

Children's Advocacy Centers rely on private sources of funding, along with state and federal grants to stay afloat. Securing additional resources has been a significant challenge during the pandemic.

ONCAC has been working to secure a line item in the state budget to support the work our CACs do on behalf of abused children. Despite broad support from the Ohio House and Senate, ONCAC's position for critical funding continues to hit roadblocks. As a result, ONCAC was not successful in inserting a funding line item into the current operating budget.

Ohioans are acutely aware of how COVID has impacted the safety and wellbeing of all Ohio children. As the state continues to open back up and unreported child sexual abuse comes to light, the number of children being served by CACs continues to rise.

This increase in numbers unfortunately coincides with another large reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding for this next fiscal year starting in October 2021. This additional 34% cut is on top of the 36% cuts experience during the prior two years. On July 20, the United States Senate passed the Victim of Crimes Act funding bill to mandate restoring money allocated to victim services organizations. While this is excellent news, it will be at least 2 years until annual funding levels are restored. This passage does not help Ohio now with pandemic-related expenses to care for our children.

The total of 70% in cuts for Ohio CACs has led to a reduction in services that can be offered to our children. Established CACs have been faced with cutting vital positions that provide specialized services to children who have been sexually abused and their families. CACs that were in the process of opening have had to stop their progress entirely as there is no longer money to fund their endeavors. Other CACs who have recognized a need to expand their services have also had to stop their growth during the ongoing pandemic ramifications.

ONCAC is requesting the state of Ohio's support for Ohio's abused children. Per the guidelines of the American Rescue Plan, ONCAC requests \$7.1 million dollars to fund its work for Ohio's citizens.

Brad L. Feldman, MPA, CAE, IOM
Executive Director
brad@oncac.org
Ohio Network of Children's Advocacy Centers