



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTIONALLIANCE**

## Sample Letter to Editor: Close the Gap

January/February 2014

**Note:** Before writing a Letter to the Editor, check with the newspaper about submission guidelines. In most cases, newspapers will limit the length of letters and require contact information for verification. Review their policies regarding their editing and publishing practices.

**Note for local programs: insert information about your local community and need:**

- Talk about any challenges meeting the demand in your community;
- If you've seen an increase in demand, talk about the impact;
- If you've experienced cuts in funding (grant or private contributions), talk about the impact.

**Describe how an increase in funding would impact your services---for example:**

- Better equipped to provide services to children and youth—including prevention efforts to stop the violence;
- Better equipped to meet emergency shelter or safe housing needs;
- Better equipped to provide trauma counseling to sexual assault survivors.

## Virginia's Crisis Centers: Close the Gap

Virginia's Sexual and Domestic Violence Crisis Centers are in crisis. A gap is widening between our communities' needs and the ability of our Crisis Centers to meet those needs. Many Crisis Centers have been stretched to the breaking point.

In the past 5 years, demand for services from victims seeking help has increased 35%. At the same time, funding has decreased. We must take action to close the gap.

Closing the gap will require a significant investment and a two-pronged approach to 1) streamline funding and 2) increase funding for Crisis Centers by \$18 million.

Failure to close the gap leaves crisis services at risk. When crisis services are at risk, the lives of women, children, and men in our communities are at risk.

How many people does this affect? The CDC estimates 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men in Virginia will experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Two Crisis Centers (Harmony Place in Front Royal and DOVES in Danville) have been forced to close their doors in the last few years. On the Eastern Shore of Virginia, no sexual assault crisis services are available.

Nearly half of Virginia's sexual and domestic violence agencies report they can no longer provide an around-the-clock public safety response to victims in their community.

Delegates Barbara Comstock and Chris Peace have introduced HB 1 to streamline funding processes—an important first step in getting more funds to victim services.

The critical second step in closing the gap between demand for services and current resources is increasing funding for sexual and domestic violence services. Budget amendments have been introduced in both the House and Senate to substantially increase funding.

Closing the gap means making safety and recovery of vulnerable and victimized Virginians a priority.

Closing the gap means the college student who walks into an emergency room and says, "I've been raped" will have a sexual assault victim advocate by her side...

... the mother who calls a domestic violence shelter and says, "I need to come in; he's going to kill me" will be certain there is a room for her and her children in the shelter.

... the young man calling a hotline after years of being haunted by his abuse as a child will be helped by a trained advocate.

... the woman in need of a protective order to keep her abusive boyfriend away from her work and home will have an advocate by her side when she goes to court.

Closing the gap for Virginia's Sexual & Domestic Violence Crisis Centers will ensure that victims of sexual and domestic violence in Virginia will be able to get help in their community when they need it.

Please support closing the gap to bring Virginia's Crisis Centers back from the brink, back to providing critical services to our communities across Virginia.

[Your name here]

[Your city here]

<sup>1</sup>Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.