

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/lifting-of-funding-restrictions-paves-the-way-for-incarcerated-survivors-of-sexual-abuse-to-access-victim-services>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

On December 31, 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) published a [summary](#) of changes to the rules governing how victim service agencies can use Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) assistance funds. The rule changes, which went into effect in August 2016, dramatically expand the ways states and territories can use funds to support victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Among the most significant changes is that victim services agencies will now be able to use VOCA funds to provide services to incarcerated people.

Until this rule change was adopted last year, rape crisis centers across the country, which depend on VOCA funds to provide many of their counseling and advocacy services, had to volunteer their time or use other often more limited funding streams to work with correctional agencies striving to meet the requirements of the [Prison Rape Elimination Act \(PREA\) standards](#) (particularly Standard 115.53: Inmate access to outside confidential support services). The new VOCA rule, along with the 2014 changes to the Office on Violence Against Women's [STOP Formula Grant Program](#), which expanded grantees' ability to use funds to support services for men, creates pathways for incarcerated survivors to access much needed outside confidential support and advocacy. As the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission stated strongly in its 2009 [final report](#), which called for changing the VOCA guidelines, all survivors of sexual assault, including those behind bars, need and deserve treatment and support.

Victim and perpetrator are not static identities or categories; people can be both, depending on their experiences and actions. Just last week, *The Crime Report* published an [article](#) about a study that found that more than half of the people arrested for gun crimes in three Connecticut cities between 2011 and 2016 had been shooting victims prior to their arrest. As we at Vera [reimagine prisons](#) in our work to elevate human dignity in the U.S. justice system, we as a country must also remember and, perhaps, reimagine victims and work to heal the trauma experienced by all who encounter the criminal justice system.

Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety applauds OVC for making these important changes, and looks forward to working in 2017 to promote sexual safety in confinement facilities, increase access to services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, and remove barriers to services for other historically marginalized survivors of crime.

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