

Testimony of
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April 28, 2009

The Victims of Crime Act: 25 Years of Protecting and Supporting Victims
United States Senate Judiciary Committee
Tuesday April 28, 2009
Susan S. Russell

Good Day,

I would like to thank Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Specter for inviting me here today to testify on behalf of victims. Indeed it is quite an honor and privilege to be here today to provide testimony on The Victims of Crime Act. While I have over a decade of experience working within victim services the most significant experience I bring before you today is as a survivor of violent crime.

Seventeen years ago, a man who resided in the same small rural community as I kidnapped, raped and nearly killed me. This man slashed 2 of my car tires and then followed me. It is highly likely that he had been stalking me for some time as several years after my assault, I learned that he had broken into my husband's truck prior to my assault and had stolen identifying information. This man held no regard for life as after begging and pleading for my life he fractured my skull in three places with a tire iron, broke several facial bones and left me to die in a remote wilderness area. I can recall gaining consciousness hours later, cold, shivering, naked and in intense pain. I recall touching my head and feeling something sharp and protruding. As a trained Emergency Medical Technician, I knew that I was in serious trouble and needed help. Somehow, I managed to stumble through the woods a tenth of a mile where there were five teenagers camped. They managed to keep me warm and awake and two of them hiked three miles to the nearest phone.

I was taken to a near-by hospital where they stabilized my injuries and prepared me to be sent to another hospital that specialized in traumatic brain injuries. While in the emergency room of the first hospital, I was met by a young and caring detective who gathered information which led to the apprehension of my assailant four days later.

Upon arrival at the emergency room of the second hospital, I had a team of nurses and doctors working to prepare me for surgery. During this time my husband was brought in, and he immediately passed out and was escorted out of the emergency room. However, after he recovered he was met by a rape crisis advocate who provided him with information and a supportive ear. During my three week stay in the hospital, the rape crisis advocate came several times to talk and/or listen. And after I returned home I was able to call the rape crisis hotline any time day or night. Rape crisis centers which provide a host of victim services such as this one are funded with VOCA funds.

At the time of my assault I worked as a hiking/canoeing guide. I subsequently lost my job and had no income. It took me many months - really many years - to recuperate physically, and part of my recover hinged on physical therapy- something not covered by my medical insurance. The medical bills alone even with health insurance reached over \$30,000. Another VOCA funded service which I benefited from is the Victims Compensation Program. Vermont's Victim Compensation will allocate \$10,000 per victim for things such as medical costs including physical therapy and counseling. These are two of the services I so desperately needed and would not have had access to if it were not for VOCA.

Soon after my assault I was contacted by the State's Attorney Victim Advocate and we found ourselves having to go through the criminal justice system. Again due to VOCA funds we were able to have a victim advocate help us navigate the criminal justice system. I am quite certain I would never have survived the criminal justice system without the information and support provided by the victim advocate. Fortunately for all of us, due to having a way to be involved and informed a plea agreement was met and the offender was convicted and sentenced to 25-35 years.

However, in approximately five years he will be released in Vermont having maxed out his sentence for a total time served of 23 years. He will be released, untreated and unsupervised-his only requirement will be to register with the Vermont Sex Offender Registry.

In closing, I would like to state that had I not had these VOCA funding services I would not be here today. I'd also like to add that these services helped my husband and I remain together as next month we will celebrate our 26 wedding anniversary. There is no doubt in my mind that without VOCA funding services I would not have been able rebuild my life and recover in a manner that moved me from a victim to a survivor. Thank you again for inviting me here to share my story.