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## **NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **AG Kaul Sues U.S. Department of Justice to Protect Services for Crime Victims**

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul on Wednesday joined a coalition of 21 attorneys general in suing the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) to block new restrictions on federal funding that supports victims of domestic violence and other crimes.

[The lawsuit](#), filed in U.S. District Court in the District of Rhode Island, challenges a new rule that would unlawfully restrict the individuals to whom legal services may be provided using Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant funds. The rule, in practice, would require crime victims to be screened for immigration status before they could receive important kinds of legal assistance that help them recover. The rule could dissuade victims and witnesses from coming forward.

Kaul and the coalition argue that the new policy is unlawful and are asking the court to stop the rule from taking effect in their states.

“Making it more difficult for crime victims to obtain services would undermine public safety,” said AG Kaul. “This bad policy should be blocked before it goes into effect.”

For decades, VOCA grants have enabled states to support victims of crime. Through VOCA’s Victim Assistance program, Wisconsin DOJ awards funds that organizations use for a broad range of services for crime victims, including civil legal assistance. The legal services must be directly related to their victimization, and can include assistance seeking an order of protection, representation in family court to gain emergency custody of children, victim’s rights representation in criminal court,

criminal background records relief, assistance establishing legal guardianship, and more.

For example, a crime victim could seek representation in family court from a VOCA-funded service provider to gain sole custody to protect a child from an abusive and dangerous partner. But under the new rule, the provider would likely need to first interrogate the immigration status of the victim, and potentially of the child, before agreeing to assist.

In state fiscal year 2024, Wisconsin's VOCA-funded organizations served 124,980 unique individuals and an additional 16,238 anonymous contacts.

Last month, USDOJ informed states that they could no longer use VOCA funds to provide legal services to undocumented immigrants. The new restriction applies not only to future VOCA funding but also to VOCA grants already awarded, and it is scheduled to take effect on October 31, 2025.

Kaul and the coalition warn that the new restrictions will upend victim services programs, cut off critical resources, and discourage survivors from seeking help. If service providers have to screen victims' or witnesses' immigration status, they could be forced to deny services to families in crisis – a policy that could ultimately silence survivors and erode trust between communities and law enforcement. The attorneys general also highlight how many service providers do not have the capacity or resources necessary to enact such screening processes.

In Wednesday's lawsuit, AG Kaul and the coalition argue that DOJ's new restrictions violate the Constitution's Spending Clause by attaching retroactive and ambiguous conditions to grants that were already awarded, in some cases years ago. The attorneys general also assert that DOJ acted in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act by failing to justify its reversal of decades-long policy and by ignoring the harm the rule will cause to victims and service providers.

Joining AG Kaul in the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia.