



THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

10 YEARS OF PROGRESS AND MOVING FORWARD

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a landmark piece of legislation that sought to improve criminal justice and community-based responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in the United States. The passage of VAWA in 1994 and its reauthorization in 2000 has changed the landscape for victims who once suffered in silence. Victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking have been able to access services, and a new generation of families and justice system professionals have come to understand that domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking are crimes that our society will not tolerate. Reauthorization and expansion of this vital legal reform should be a Congressional priority in 2005.

A HISTORY OF PROGRESS

Creating new system responses - VAWA programs, funding and law reforms have changed federal, tribal, state and local responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking by:

- Securing buy-in from formerly unengaged systems, like law enforcement, courts, and social services
- Creating a federal leadership role that has encouraged tribes, states and local government to improve responses to victims and perpetrators
- Establishing new federal crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking to fill in jurisdictional gaps in prosecuting these crimes
- Defining the crimes of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, as well as identifying promising practices to respond to these crimes
- Focusing on the needs of underserved communities, such as immigrant and Native women

VAWA 1994 - Congress, in passing VAWA 1994, envisioned a nation with an engaged criminal justice system and coordinated community responses. VAWA 1994 fostered:

- Community-coordinated responses that brought together, for the first time, the criminal justice system, the social services system, and private nonprofit organizations responding to domestic violence and sexual assault
- Recognition and support for the efforts of domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and other community organizations nationwide working everyday to end this violence
- Federal prosecution of interstate domestic violence and sexual assault crimes
- Federal guarantees of interstate enforcement of protection orders
- Protections for battered immigrants
- A new focus on underserved populations and Native victims of domestic violence and sexual assault

VAWA 2000 - Congress improved on the foundation established in VAWA 1994, including:

- Identifying the additional related crimes of dating violence and stalking
- The creation of a much-needed legal assistance program for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault

- Promoting supervised visitation programs for families experiencing violence
- Further protecting immigrants experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking, by establishing U- and T-visas and by focusing on trafficking of persons

CREATING POSITIVE CHANGE

VAWA's effectiveness is evident in the progress that has been made since implementation. We know that local, state, and national laws are changing; programs, businesses, and communities are responding to victims' needs; and studies show that rates of violence and reporting of crime are changing. Consider these highlights from 10 years of VAWA:

- States have passed more than 660 laws to combat domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. All states have passed laws making stalking a crime and changed laws that treated date or spousal rape as a lesser crime than stranger rape.
- Since 1996, the National Domestic Violence Hotline has answered over 1 million calls. The Hotline answers over 16,000 calls a month and provides access to translators in 139 languages.
- Businesses also have joined the national fight against violence. Hundreds of companies, led by the model programs established by Altria, Polaroid, Liz Claiborne, The Body Shop, Aetna and DuPont, have created Employee Assistance Programs that help victims of domestic violence.
- More victims are reporting violence: among victims of violence by an intimate partner, the percentage of women who reported the crime was greater in 1998 (59%) than in 1993 (48%).

MOVING FORWARD

The success of VAWA has proven that it is possible to combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Yet there is more work that needs to be done, including:

- Eliminating domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking against teens and children
- Focusing on preventing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in future generations
- Better serving Native women and communities of color
- Addressing the economic consequences of violence on victims
- Improving joint responses to domestic violence by enhancing cross-training and collaboration between domestic violence victim service providers and child welfare system professionals
- Enhancing enforcement and perpetrator accountability
- Continued training for the increasing number of criminal justice and social service system professionals dealing with domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking
- Increasing domestic and sexual violence screening and health treatment services, with a specific emphasis on programs that reach pregnant women and new mothers
- Providing alternative community-based responses and supports when criminal justice systems cannot respond adequately
- Ensuring that all victims—not only domestic violence victims—are served effectively by VAWA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR VAWA 2005 REAUTHORIZATION?

VAWA 2005 provides an opportunity to “think outside of the box” and take a more holistic approach to the problems of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Recognizing that VAWA seeks to support women, men and children in living healthy, safe lives, this reauthorization will seek new remedies, such as:

- Shifting from a solely criminal justice response to a more holistic community-based response that helps victims become self-sufficient, including housing support and employment protection
- Continuing to improve the criminal and civil judicial response to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking
- Serving the needs of children exposed to domestic violence and sexual assault
- Providing funding for expanded services addressing dating violence, sexual assault and stalking
- Recognizing the specialized needs of communities of color, Native women and women with disabilities in this work and developing leadership roles for members of these communities in designing and implementing these specialized services
- Focusing on prevention and educating the next generation to avoid the use of these crimes of violence
- Engaging male allies in the work

Ten years of progress reinforces the hope that violence against women can be overcome. This year, we hope to continue striving for a nation without domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

We hope that others will join us in recognizing the devastation of this violence and the support needed by individuals and communities nationwide. Join The National Task Force to End Domestic and Sexual Violence Against Women and support the VAWA 2005 Reauthorization.

The programs described here are proposals under consideration for inclusion in the VAWA reauthorization bill that Members of Congress will introduce in early 2005. As the bill has not been finalized, we cannot be certain that the proposals will be included as described in this document.