



## **THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT**

### **REAUTHORIZATION 2005**

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2000 expires in 2005 and the remarkable gains we've made in ending domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking could come to a halt if Congress does not act quickly. As we look forward to the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, Congress has a unique opportunity not only to continue successful and vital programs, but also to expand on 10 years of progress to further the safety and stability of the lives of survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

- A broad group of law enforcement, victim service providers, community leaders, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence and stalking have evaluated VAWA and recommended the changes necessary for a VAWA 2005 that would effectively and thoroughly respond to the epidemic of violence against women in our nation.
- VAWA 2005 must enhance core programs and policies in the criminal justice and legal systems and reaffirm the commitment to reform systems that affect adult and minor victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- VAWA 2005 must also make bold new strides in ending domestic and sexual violence and stalking by addressing currently unmet needs.
- This bill should provide practical solutions to improving the response of the criminal justice and legal systems by expanding funding for local groups working with underserved communities, strengthening the criminal justice response to sexual assault, developing standards for protecting the confidentiality of victims served by VAWA programs, enhancing collaboration between victim service organizations and civil legal assistance providers, and enhancing provisions to fully enforce protective orders across state lines.
- It is essential that VAWA 2005 include the reauthorization of critical programs and the development of new services that respond to evolving community needs. Solution-based remedies should address the concerns of victims generally, as well as the unique needs of disabled, elderly, Native, legal immigrant, and ethnic minority victims, and victims living in rural communities.
- Domestic violence is one of the primary causes of homelessness. Survivors and advocates consistently rate housing as a top priority, and 92% of homeless women have been physically or sexually assaulted. In order to address the housing problem, VAWA 2005 should provide a comprehensive yet pragmatic approach that includes expanding transitional housing options, protecting the safety and confidentiality of homeless victims receiving services, ensuring that victims can access the criminal justice system without jeopardizing their current or future housing, and creating permanent housing solutions that help develop communities and build collaborations between service providers, government agencies and housing developers.
- While it is imperative to continue VAWA's focus on responding to the violence, reauthorization should also address prevention. By intervening early with children who have witnessed domestic violence, supporting young families at risk for violence, and changing social norms through targeted interventions with boys and teens, we can take the next step toward truly ending the violence.
- Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking adversely affect our nation's youth and perpetuate a society of violence. VAWA 2005 should provide a comprehensive approach for assisting children, teens and young adults who have violence in their lives. VAWA 2005 needs to include initiatives such as assisting schools with creating policies and programs, providing teens and young adults with appropriate services, ensuring access to court systems, and preventing abuse during child visitation.

- VAWA should dramatically improve the response to violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women at all levels. It is estimated that 1 of 3 Native women will be raped and that 6 of 10 will be physically assaulted during their lifetimes. Seriously addressing violence against Native women requires strengthening the capacity of Indian nations to provide tribal-based services to women and to hold offenders accountable for criminal acts of violence.
- Domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking are health care problems of epidemic proportions. In addition to the immediate trauma caused by abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking contribute to other chronic health problems. A critical gap remains in the delivery of health care to domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. In order to improve the health care system's response to violence against women and thus ensure proper treatment and help, VAWA 2005 should provide for the training and education of health care providers and fund federal health programs to improve their services to victims.
- Survivors identify economic independence as one of the most important factors in determining whether they will be able to escape a violent relationship or address the aftermath of a sexual assault. But all too often, victims find their jobs jeopardized by a number of factors: 1) their abusers try to retain control over them through destabilizing their employment; or 2) when they take needed time off from work to go to court, heal from injuries, or take steps to increase their safety, they lose their jobs. Additionally, insurers deny insurance policies and claims based on domestic violence in all lines of insurance, depriving survivors of the means to obtain health care for themselves and their children and to provide for their families in case of injury, death or property damage.
- Provisions in VAWA 2005 should give victims reasonable unpaid leave from work to take steps to address the violence; allow victims to access unemployment insurance benefits if they need to leave a job; and protect their access to insurance coverage.
- VAWA 1994 and 2000 recognized the special circumstances that can apply to non-citizen survivors of domestic violence and provided avenues for battered spouses and children to leave their abusive families without jeopardizing their immigration status. VAWA 2005 should provide new forms of immigration relief for immigrant domestic violence and trafficking victims. In addition, VAWA 2005 should make technical corrections to existing immigration law, resolving inconsistencies in the eligibility of immigrant victims.
- The victims of intimate partner violence associated with the Armed Forces are particularly vulnerable due to isolation, mobile residency, financial insecurity, and fear of adverse career consequences and impact, with resultant severe underreporting of incidents and the failure to access services, care, and treatment. To address this problem, VAWA 2005 should include provisions to establish a commission of appointed military leaders and civilian experts to ensure implementation of recommendations from past and present task forces on domestic violence and sexual assault. It should also ensure collaboration between civilian authorities and military installations; confidential services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; research, standardized data collection, and evaluation; coordination with national hotlines and increased public education efforts; availability of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners at military hospitals; and continued development of the Victim Advocacy Program.

Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking are pervasive crimes directly affecting **one in four women** and touching the lives of everyone in the community. We can make a difference by reauthorizing VAWA.

**We urge members of Congress to pledge their support for a strong and enhanced Violence Against Women Act in 2005.**

**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.**