



Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Key Recommendations from Advocates for Reauthorization

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence ("NTF") focuses on the development, passage and implementation of effective public policy to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The full membership of the NTF comprises a large and diverse group of national, tribal, state, territorial and local organizations, as well as individuals, committed to securing an end to domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

The NTF is supporting a number of key enhancements to the Violence Against Women Act based on the results of our process of gathering the input of thousands of advocates and allied professionals about the needs of survivors and communities. Extensive feedback from the field informed the work of subject matter workgroups, which developed specific recommendations to improve VAWA in critical areas. ***Any bill that erodes current protections or fails to advance critical policy to enhance safety for survivors is unacceptable.***

INVEST IN PREVENTION:

- Increase the authorization of the Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE) to \$150 million (current authorization \$50 million), add sexual harassment to its authorized uses, and add language requiring the involvement of and funding for involvement of OVW-recognized sexual assault coalitions in RPE planning and implementation. Demand for programs funded by RPE has skyrocketed with the #MeToo movement and the national focus on addressing campus sexual assault, and a corresponding increase is critically necessary to meet the needs of communities to improve prevention efforts.
- Increase funding for VAWA Consolidated Youth grants. Prevention education that engages men and boys as allies and promotes healthy relationships is key to reducing gender-based violence. Increased funding will provide programs with the resources they need to increase the depth and reach of these critical programs.

EXPAND ACCESS:

- Promote safety for victims of violence on tribal lands by: clarifying that tribal courts can hold domestic violence offenders who assault tribal police officers or other justice officials accountable; ensuring non-Indian perpetrators who commit sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, or trafficking on tribal lands are held accountable; creating a permanent authorization for DOJ's Tribal Access to National Crime Information Program; improving the response to cases of missing and murdered women in tribal communities; and addressing the unique barriers to safety for Alaska Native women.
- Increase the authorization for the Sexual Assault Services Program to \$120 million to address increased demand and waiting lists for services.
- Expressly include sexual harassment as part of sexual violence addressed by the Workplace Resource Center to ensure it can continue to provide tools, resources, and training to private employers and federal agencies on preventing and responding to workers and workplaces impacted by such violence and harassment.
- Strengthen economic security for survivors by enhancing existing law, including allowing all domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking victims to apply for unemployment insurance; conduct research on the economic impacts of victimization for college students; and provide public education related to economic abuse and economic security for victims.
- Train healthcare providers to better recognize and respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking across the lifespan, particularly through HRSA programs such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program.

REMOVE BARRIERS:

- Ensure compliance with VAWA non-discrimination requirements and guarantee equal access to VAWA protections for all victims regardless of gender, especially those from marginalized communities.
- Enforce housing rights for survivors/victims; create a position at HUD specifically tasked with this work; increase survivors' options to maintain housing or break their leases; strengthen emergency transfer protections in federal housing programs and create a Victim Relocation Voucher pool to assist survivors needing to flee their homes due to safety concerns; and improve the homeless system response to survivors.
- Add a new purpose to the Improving Criminal Justice Response and Campus grant programs to implement alternative justice responses that are focused on victim autonomy, agency, and safety to provide resolution and restitution for the victim.
- Strengthen privacy protections across state lines, online with digital records, and preserve confidentiality upon a survivor's death in accordance with their wishes.
- Limit the use of bench warrants and other body attachments to compel victim cooperation and testimony, as this has been found to be traumatizing for the victim and counterproductive in encouraging victims to cooperate.
- Acknowledge incarcerated women as survivors of domestic and sexual violence; address the trauma of incarceration on women and their family members, especially their children; improve health care services and trauma informed responses to better prepare incarcerated women to return to their communities; and require BJS/NIF to regularly conduct research on the status of incarcerated women.
- Improve enforcement of current domestic violence-related firearms laws and equally protect all victims by restricting firearms possession by adjudicated domestic and dating abusers and stalkers, regardless of their location.

DEFINITIONS:

Revise definitions to clarify language, match state laws, address new technological concerns, and provide technical corrections.

- New definitions include: Abuse in Later Life (in lieu of elder abuse); Alternative Justice Response; Digital Services; Forced Marriage; Economic Abuse; and Technological Abuse.
- Amended definitions include:
 - Domestic Violence – the original definition is outdated and does not sync with most state laws
 - Correct unintended 2013 deletion of "Court-based and court-related personnel"
 - Legal Services (to include vacatur and expungement)

NEW GRANT CONDITIONS:

- Allow grantees to use technology to protect victim privacy.
- Extend advocate confidentiality beyond the death of the victim so victims feel free to communicate fully with their advocates without concern for reputation, civil liability, or possible harm to friends or family.

AMENDED GRANT CONDITIONS:

- Clarify that VAWA confidentiality applies to federal and state agencies seeking information from grantees.
- Urge DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to make trainings widely available.
- Permit grantees to serve victims of forced marriage who are also victims of a VAWA crime.
- Increase the cap on expenditures requiring Deputy Attorney General approval to allow DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women to more easily provide oversight and support for VAWA multi-day training events.

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