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## **BIDEN DISCUSSES PLAN TO TRAIN 100,000 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWYERS**

### ***One In Four Women Report Domestic Abuse During Their Lifetime***

Des Moines, IA (October 17, 2007) – Today at Creative Visions, a human development nonprofit center in Des Moines, Sen. Joe Biden discussed his path-breaking plan to battle domestic violence. Despite the programs that exist currently to help those who are facing domestic abuse, including Sen. Biden's landmark Violence Against Women Act, there are many low-income domestic violence victims who need a lawyer but can't get one. Studies estimate that less than one in five low-income victims of domestic violence ever see a lawyer. Immediate legal help for domestic violence victims is key at the crucial moment when they reach out for help when they call a Hotline, walk into a courtroom or involve the police.

To help alleviate the demand for legal help, Sen. Biden introduced a plan to enlist, train and place 100,000 lawyers into the justice system to represent domestic violence victims. The National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act creates a new, electronic National Domestic Violence Attorney Network and Referral Project that will help facilitate the placement of these attorneys. In addition, the Act enlists the National Domestic Violence Hotline and various internet sources to provide legal referrals. Before kick-starting the national effort, the Justice Department will design pilot programs in five states to test the program. The Act also establishes a Domestic Violence Legal Advisory Task Force.

“It is our obligation to address the fact that nearly one in four women still report instances of domestic abuse during their lifetime,” said Sen. Biden. “The single, most important legislative accomplishment in my 32-year old career in the Senate was the passage of the Violence Against Women Act. But, we cannot stop there. In 2006 alone, more than 200,000 people called the National Domestic Violence Hotline seeking help and, after getting safety information, many wanted access to lawyers. We owe our mothers and daughters, friends and neighbors, access to legal help if they ever find themselves in a dangerous situation.”

Sen. Biden led the fight to criminalize violence against women and to hold batterers truly accountable by writing the ground-breaking Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in the 1990s. It encouraged states to set up coordinated community responses to domestic violence and rape; spurred states to pass hundreds of laws prohibiting family

violence; and provided resources to create shelters so battered women abused by husbands and boyfriends had a safe place to go. The law also established a national hotline for abused women that over 1.5 million have used for help. By training law enforcement and prosecutors to treat abuse like the crime it is by arresting and convicting abusive husbands instead of telling them to take a walk around the block, and by empowering women to make changes in their lives, domestic violence is down 50 percent and rape is down 60 percent nationwide.

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### **The 100,000 Attorneys:**

The National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act Domestic violence remains a reality for one out of four women in our country. Experts agree a key to ending domestic violence is meaningful access to the justice system. Often stopping the violence hinges on a victim's ability to obtain effective protection orders, initiate separation proceedings or design safe child custody. Yet thousands of victims of domestic violence go without representation every day in this country. At best, less than 1 out of 5 low-income victims ever see a lawyer.

There is a wealth of untapped resources in this country – lawyers who want to volunteer. Senator Biden's National Domestic Violence Volunteer Act would harness the skills, enthusiasm and dedication of these lawyers and infuse 100,000 new volunteer lawyers into the justice system to represent domestic violence victims. To enlist, train and place lawyers, the Act creates a new, electronic National Domestic Violence Attorney Network and Referral Project. There are five components of the bill:

1. Creates a National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Referral Project to be managed by the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence. With \$2 million of new federal funding each year, the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence will solicit for volunteer lawyers and then create and maintain an electronic network. It will provide appropriate mentoring, training and technical assistance to volunteer lawyers. And it will establish and maintain a point of contact in each state – a statewide legal coordinator – to help match willing lawyers to victims.
2. Enlists the National Domestic Violence Hotline and Internet sources to provide legal referrals. The bill will authorize \$500,000 of new federal spending to the National Domestic Violence Hotline to update their system and train advocates on how to provide legal referrals to callers in coordination with the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence. Legal referrals may also be done by qualified Internet-based services.
3. Creates a Pilot Program and National Rollout of National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network and Referral Project. The bill designs a pilot program to implement the volunteer attorney network in five diverse states with \$750,000 grants. The Office on Violence Against Women in the Department of

Justice will administer these monies to qualified statewide legal coordinators to help them connect with the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, and the volunteer lawyers. After a successful stint in five states, the bill will rollout the program nationally with annual appropriations of \$8 million each year.

4. Establishes a Domestic Violence Legal Advisory Task Force.
5. Mandates the Government Accounting Office to study each state and assess the scope and quality of legal services available to battered women and report back to Congress within a year. An excellent roundtable of groups reviewed and contributed to this legislation, including the National Network to End Domestic Violence, the Legal Resource Center for Violence Against Women, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the American Bar Association, WomensLaw.org, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, the Legal Services Corporation, the American Prosecutors Research Institute, National Legal Aid and Defenders Association, National Center for State Courts, National Association for Attorneys General, Battered Women's Justice Project, National Association of Women Judges, National Association of Women Lawyers, National Crime Victim Bar Association and National Center for the Victims of Crime.

(<http://campaignsandelections.com/nh/releases/index.cfm?ID=5229>)

### **Biden Blog Post, October 18, 2007:**

I believe there is a wealth of untapped resources in this country — lawyers who want to volunteer. Yesterday in Des Moines, I spoke at Creative Visions, a human development center, and unveiled my National Domestic Violence Volunteer Act, which would harness the skills, enthusiasm and dedication of these lawyers and infuse 100,000 new volunteer lawyers into the justice system to represent domestic violence victims. I believe this initiative builds on the best of American ideals — volunteerism, technology know how, collaboration between the private and public sectors and our unwavering commitment to justice and service.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time to shine a light on the dark scourge of abuse that affects one out of four Americans each year. In Iowa alone in 2006, there were 77,256 calls to the state's domestic violence and sexual assault hotline and more than 23,000 victims of abuse helped by shelters and other service providers. Since 1995, 167 Iowans have been killed in domestic violence situations.

Once a domestic violence victim steps out from the shadow of an abusive relationship, what does she need? Lawyers. Domestic violence victims are in dire need for legal help for everything from obtaining protection orders to arranging child custody to instigating divorce proceedings.

A national survey by the National Network to End Domestic Violence found that in just one 24 hour cycle, more than 5,000 pleas for services, be it emergency shelter, transitional housing or legal aid, were unmet because of a lack of resources. This shortage means that thousands of victims of domestic violence go without legal representation in this country every day. And in fact, reports indicate that fewer than 1 out of every 5 low income domestic violence victims ever sees a lawyer.

It is vital that a victim have an advocate helping her when she steps out of the abuse for the first time. The very second a battered woman calls the Hotline, reaches out to the police or walks into a courtroom, we need to connect this courageous person with legal assistance. Victims walk out on a limb when they seek help, often risking their personal safety. These first calls for help are critical moments when a victim must feel supported; if she doesn't, she may retreat back into the abuse.

The single, most important legislative accomplishment in my 32 year old career in the Senate is passing the Violence Against Women Act. After years of work, countless hours of hearings, pages of expert testimony and Senate floor debate, my Act passed in 1994. The law was renewed in 2000 and most recently expanded in 2005 when I worked to include new measures to treat children who witness violence, to increase housing opportunities and to create dedicated resources for rape crisis centers.

Recognizing that campus gates don't keep out abuse, stalking and sexual assault, the Violence Against Women Act also created a special \$15 million program for colleges and universities to create campus wide victim services and security programs. The Act has transformed the way police, prosecutors, judges and advocates tackle domestic violence in their communities, and infused more than \$4 billion dollars to state systems to fight violence against women. In 2007 alone, Iowa received \$1.3 million for domestic violence programs with police, prosecutors, judges and advocates. But we are not done.

In May, I introduced the National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act, legislation that, for the first time, creates a streamlined national system to recruit and train volunteer lawyers and match them with domestic violence victims. Using the power of the Internet, this nationwide network of attorneys will be coordinated by American Bar Association; statewide legal coordinators would manage legal services in their individual states, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline and Internet based services would provide legal referrals to victims. The historic partnership forged in my bill will mean that enthusiastic potential advocates quickly and seamlessly will get linked to training and new clients. And at the same time, desperate victims will be referred to a statewide coordinator and quickly connected to a lawyer. I want to end the frustrating, and often fruitless, task of calling different agencies, offices, or groups, either to volunteer or find a lawyer.

I know the American people are ready to meet the challenges we face here at home and abroad, and I hope you will take a moment to read more about my plan as we all work to put an end to domestic violence.