

# *Women's eNews*

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## **Budget Falls Short for Domestic Violence Programs**

**By Allison Stevens, Washington Bureau Chief**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (WOMENSENEWS) – President Bush is not putting his money where his mouth is on domestic violence policy, advocates argue.

One month after he held a ceremony in the Oval Office to sign legislation that would authorize a considerable increase in funding to aid victims of domestic violence, Bush proposed an overall cut to domestic violence programs and services and included no funding for the law's new programs, effectively placing them on indefinite hold.

The news, delivered last week in the president's fiscal 2007 budget resolution, a non-binding document that serves as a blueprint for government spending, dampened the spirits of domestic violence activists.

John Nowacki, a spokesperson for the Department of Justice, which oversees some of the country's domestic violence programs, said the plans did not reflect a wavering commitment to combating domestic violence. "The department will continue to support federal, state and local efforts to end violence against women," he said.

But domestic violence activists are taking nothing for granted. They're working to build a national campaign to persuade members of Congress to reject the president's budget plans and fund at least some of the new domestic violence law's new programs.

"Congress definitely supports these programs and they'll put them in the appropriations bills" later this year, said Jill Morris, public policy director at the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an advocacy organization based in Denver.

### ***Funding Falls Short of Promise***

Bush signed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act into law on Jan. 6.

That law, along with the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, a separate law that provides funding for shelters and other services for victims of abuse, approves federal spending on related programs of up to \$1 billion in the coming fiscal year, according to statistics provided by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, an advocacy group in Washington, D.C.

But actual spending would fall short of that amount under the president's budget.

The administration requested \$546 million for domestic violence programs in fiscal 2007, a decrease of \$20 million – or 3.5 percent – from the amount appropriated in 2006, the anti-violence network's figures indicate. The amount does not include any funding for 21 newly enacted programs, the largest of which is a \$50 million program that provides services for survivors of sexual assault.

If the administration gets its way, few of the existing programs would come close to receiving the full amount authorized by the new law. Services Training Officers Providers grants – money for victim services and law enforcement programs that is divvied up by federal formula and sent to states – are one of several examples. They were authorized at \$225 million but were funded at \$156 million in the president's spending plan.

Observers attributed the administration's reluctance to fully fund domestic violence programs to the overriding atmosphere of fiscal restraint on Capitol Hill.

Domestic violence services are but a small fraction of the many programs outside defense and homeland security that would not receive full funding if the president's \$2.8 trillion budget wins congressional approval later this year and is followed by similar appropriations.

### ***Social Programs Bear the Brunt***

Many of the programs that face cuts aid the poor, a majority of whom are women.

One of the most significant proposals would curb the growth of Medicare and Medicaid for a savings of \$48 billion over the next five years. Other targeted areas include education, housing assistance for the elderly, food stamp programs and child care.

But of the many government programs that would be cut, Joan Entmacher, a budget analyst at the National Women's Law Center in Washington, D.C., found reduced spending on domestic violence programs among the most troubling. "They're not by any means the deepest cuts in the budget," she said. "But a lot of people fought very hard" to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.

Bush defended the proposed cuts when he introduced his budget resolution last week, saying fiscal restraint is needed to control soaring deficits and the "unsustainable growth" of entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security. "As more Baby Boomers retire and collect their benefits, our deficits are projected to grow," he said. "These unfunded liabilities will put a burden on our children and our grandchildren."

Fiscal conservatives have also complained that spending has gotten out of control thanks to the war in Iraq, the new prescription drug benefit and emergency relief from natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. In the long run, conservatives say, Americans at every economic level will

benefit from smaller government. Otherwise, the public will bear the burden in higher payroll taxes, which they predict will cut into family budgets and slow job growth.

Women's rights advocates countered that the budget cuts would not be necessary if the president didn't also call for billions of dollars in new tax cuts, which they said are geared primarily toward wealthy corporations and individuals.

"This budget just really highlights the insanity" of the administration, Entmacher said.

### ***No Funding for New Programs***

Apart from overall funding, domestic violence activists were also disappointed that none of the new programs would receive any money if the president's budget is followed.

But they blamed poor timing more than administration intent.

Budget writers, who began drafting the resolution last summer, may not have had enough time to include funding for the new programs, which were enacted only weeks ago, they said. They hope that will be corrected this summer and fall when congressional appropriators gather to dole out money for government programs.

Among the programs not slated to receive money include the new sexual assault services program; grants for law enforcement training; youth outreach and justice programs; prevention of abuse campaigns aimed at men and children; grants to combat violence in public housing; outreach services to Native American victims of abuse; grants to develop long-term housing for victims; and money to pay for studies of and research on the issue.

But the new programs, most of which are relatively small, would make sound fiscal as well as social policy, proponents argued.

New programs, as well as existing ones, ultimately translate into government savings because they increase worker productivity, reduce hospital and court costs, and curb gang violence and homelessness, said Allison Randall, public policy director at the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

"It's a small amount of money, but it does a lot of good," she said.

*Allison Stevens is Washington bureau chief at Women's eNews.*

For more information:

National Network to End Domestic Violence: <http://www.nnedv.org>

The White House Office of Management and Budget: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>

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