For Immediate Release

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Violence Against Women Act

The Huffington Post reports: "The Violence Against Women Act is finally heading to the president's desk this week after a dragged-out political fight over expanding protections to Native American, LGBT and immigrant victims of abuse."

LISA BRUSH, lbrush@pitt.edu

Brush is author of Poverty, Battered Women, and Work in U.S. Public Policy and professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. She said today: "Congressional (especially House) Republicans object to VAWA's covering several specific groups: Native American women, immigrant women, and what one might generically term sexual minority and gender non-conforming people. This objection is an unconscionable instance of discrimination against some of the most vulnerable people in the country. The jurisdictional issues the House Republicans invoke regarding Native American women are stunningly close to the states' rights rhetoric of 19th and 20th century racism.

"The lack of protections for immigrant women is a key point of their vulnerability to physical violence, emotional blackmail, and other forms of coercive control; denying immigrant women the protections and resources of VAWA makes immigrant status an additional source of leverage for abusive men. Excluding lesbians, bisexual women, and transwomen from the resources and protections of VAWA makes Republican legislators collaborators in the physical violence and other abuse used to punish and extort people who are all the more vulnerable because they do not conform to convention – the very minorities a democracy should be at pains to protect from bigotry."

TIFFANY WILLIAMS, tiffany@ips-dc.org

Williams is advocacy director with the Break The Chain Campaign at the Institute for Policy Studies, which "seeks to prevent and address the abuse and exploitation of migrant women workers."

She said today: "As advocates for women who have been trafficked and abused, we are relieved that the House 'substitute' was defeated and that the Senate version of the Violence Against Women Act was passed in the House today. The Senate version of the bill,
which passed with bipartisan support and the vote of every woman Senator, also included the full text of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, an equally significant bill that would have undoubtedly languished in the House were it not attached to this bill by Senator Leahy. This final bill expands protections to the most vulnerable members of our society including Native American women and LGBT victims.

"Each time that VAWA and TVPA are reauthorized, they typically include small fixes in the bill that come from on-the-ground experience of advocates who are working with abused and assaulted women day in and day out. While several House Republicans made provocative statements about the need to protect survivors of violence through the TVPA, the version their party offered was weak and not inclusive or representative of the needs expressed by women across the country. We were relieved to see that, in the end, the Senate version of the bill passed with a healthy majority and bipartisan support, indicating that on issues as serious as domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, Congress can overcome politics and do the right thing. We are looking forward to President Obama’s swift signature on this bill.

"In our work at Break the Chain Campaign, we are seeing a growing number of workers being exploited systematically by employers who use immigration status as a means of control. This, combined with the existing need to protect immigrant survivors of violence and crime, has meant that the cap on U-Visas needs to be raised. The U visa, a non-immigrant status offered to help stabilize victims of violence and crime so that they can cooperate with law enforcement and pursue justice, is capped at 10,000 and has consistently met this cap months early each year. Last year’s VAWA included a provision that would have raised this cap so that more victims could be covered, but it did not make it into this year’s version. Our groups will be pushing for an increase in the cap as part of immigration reform, since lack of immigration status remains a primary vulnerability that leaves victims unable to come forward and seek help."

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