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## **In Light of Advancements, Domestic Violence Advocates Urge Congress to Strengthen and Reauthorize Violence Against Women Act**

To: National Desk

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WASHINGTON, July 19 /U.S. Newswire/ – Lynn Rosenthal, president of The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), joined actress Salma Hayek and other advocates to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the need to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

NNEDV has been a leading force in efforts to support VAWA. Along with its member state domestic violence coalitions, NNEDV also played a crucial role in the passage of VAWA in 1994 and its reauthorization in 2000. VAWA is set to expire on Sept. 30 unless Congress acts now, and Rosenthal said the hearing is an important step forward in ensuring that this vital legislation is reauthorized.

“I was a shelter director in 1993 before VAWA passed Congress. I never could have imagined that police officers, prosecutors, victim advocates and survivors would sit at the table together to develop model policies for responding to domestic and sexual violence” said Rosenthal. “Yet all this happened and more. Today, we ask Congress to build upon VAWA’s successes by reauthorizing VAWA, making it a stronger and more effective tool in the struggle to end domestic and sexual violence.”

During her testimony, Rosenthal offered recommendations for strengthening VAWA and highlighted local success stories:

- Enhance existing services and programs: Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors (STOP) grants are intended to develop and strengthen effective law enforcement and prosecution strategies to combat violent crimes against women. In Wisconsin, Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors (STOP) grants helped support community response teams in 50 counties. VAWA funding will continue to support coordinated community response systems and institutionalize best practices.
- Ensure the needs of uniquely vulnerable populations are being addressed: In rural communities, a victim might be hundreds of miles away from the nearest courthouse, shelter or hospital emergency room. VAWA funding helped North Florida start 17 domestic violence task forces in counties that previously had no services – agreements were made with law enforcement to ensure 911 calls were being responded to and transportation programs were created so that victims could access safe services across counties. VAWA will continue to improve services to rural communities, as well as older women, disabled individuals, immigrants and Native women.
- Provide opportunities for victims to rebuild their lives: A staggering 92 percent of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> Homelessness does not cause domestic violence, but rather the opposite -- domestic violence frequently forces women into homeless. Women are being evicted or denied housing for calling the police, filing protective orders or even calling for help. If victims are afraid to reach out for help for fear of losing their housing, our efforts to strengthen criminal justice protections are undermined. VAWA will improve safety for victims by bringing desperately needed resources, collaborations and protections to help end homelessness and domestic and sexual violence.

“From workplace to the schoolyard, violence against women spills out into our streets and communities,” said Rosenthal. “The tremendous needs uncovered more than a decade ago have begun to be addressed, and now is not the time to retreat. Please, strengthen and reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.”

The Senate bill – S. 1197 – was introduced in June by Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) and a bipartisan group of co-sponsors. Initially passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000, VAWA is a landmark piece of legislation that improves criminal justice and community-based responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in the United States. The legislation includes provisions for improving the response of the criminal justice and legal systems; reauthorizing critical programs and developing new services that respond to evolving

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Browne & Shari S. Bassuk, Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample, *Am. J. of Orthopsychiatry*, Apr. 1997, at 261-278; Angela Browne, Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who are Survivors of Family Violence, *JAMA*, Spring 1998, at 57-64.

community needs; creating programs that focus on violence prevention and intervention; developing a comprehensive approach for assisting children, teens and young adults who experience violence; creating solutions to prevent victims and their children from becoming homeless; closing the gap in the delivery of health care to domestic violence and sexual assault survivors; highlighting the needs of communities of color; and providing funding for rape crisis centers and other agencies to provide advocacy services to victims of sexual assault.

#### The National Network to End Domestic Violence

The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) is a membership and advocacy organization representing state domestic violence coalitions, allied organizations and supportive individuals. NNEDV works to create a social, political and economic environment in which violence against women no longer exists. Working to that end, NNEDV has become the leading voice among domestic violence advocates, developing policy that changes the way our country deals with this complex and far-reaching problem. For more information, please visit <http://www.nnedv.org>.

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