Tools for the Faith Community to Advocate for the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act
Dear Colleagues,

We at Jewish Women International know that the faith community plays a crucial role in supporting victims of violence in times of crisis and raising awareness about abuse.

As you know, the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is at a critical juncture and we need your partnership. As Congress goes out on summer recess from August 6th through September 7th, it is critical that we continue to pressure our lawmakers to pass a final VAWA and send it to the President’s desk to sign.

In the weeks ahead, we invite you to join us as we call on our Members of Congress to pass a final reauthorization bill that builds on VAWA’s lifesaving programs and services and protects all victims of violence. We hope you will use the resources in this toolkit to contact your Members of Congress and take action in your community. Below you find a table of contents describing the materials in this toolkit:

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Thank you for your commitment to advocating for these important issues and making all of our communities safer.

Sincerely,

Lori Weinstein
Executive Director
Fact Sheet and Talking Points

The Violence Against Women Act, enacted in 1994, recognizes the insidious and pervasive nature of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking and supports comprehensive, effective and cost saving responses to these crimes. VAWA programs, administered by the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services, give law enforcement, prosecutors and judges the tools they need to hold offenders accountable and keep communities safe while supporting victims.

Prevalence of Violence Against Women
- Nearly 1 in 5 women have been raped in their lifetime.1
- 1 in 4 women have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner while 1 in 7 men experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner.1
- In a recent nationwide survey, nearly 10% of high school students report being hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend in the 12 months prior to the survey.2

VAWA Saves Lives and Money
VAWA-funded programs have unquestionably improved the national response to violence against women. More victims are coming forward and receiving lifesaving services to help them move from crisis to stability, and the criminal justice system has improved its ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. Since VAWA was first passed in 1994:
- Reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51%.3
- All states have passed laws making stalking a crime and have strengthened rape laws.
- The number of individuals killed by an intimate partner has decreased by 34% for women and 57% for men.4
- VAWA saved $12.6 billion in its first 6 years alone.5

Talking Points on Current VAWA Reauthorization Efforts
- VAWA has always been a bipartisan effort of Congress since it was first passed 18 years ago;
- VAWA is due for reauthorization and this gives Congress an opportunity to continue VAWA’s successful programs and services and ensure that the needs of all victims of violence are met;
- The House and Senate passed their own VAWA reauthorization bills (H.R. 4970 and S. 1925) in recent months but neither has taken meaningful steps to reconcile their bills and send a final one to the President;
- Although the Senate bill was stronger in many respects and included protections for immigrant victims, LGBT victims and Native women, the House bill shares many of the important provisions of the Senate bill like a strong, consolidated prevention program for young people, additional resources for victims of sexual assault, and critical programs for victims of elder abuse;
- The faith community is deeply committed to the reauthorization of VAWA this Congress – faith leaders are on the front lines offering victims support and raising awareness about abuse in their communities and over 50 national faith organizations signed a letter last year urging Congress to reauthorize VAWA;
- Too much is at stake for Congress to allow VAWA to languish any longer and we are calling on our Members of Congress to speak to their party leadership to urge them to send a final bill to the President’s desk to sign that includes protections for all victims of violence.

1 The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010.
2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009.
4 Uniform Crime report (UCR) Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR), Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Decrease is based on date collected between 1995 and 2007).
Tips for Meeting with Policymakers

Meeting with your Senators and Representatives in person is one of the most effective ways to influence your elected officials. Members of Congress take their constituents’ opinions seriously, especially when constituents take the time to go to a Member’s office. Below are helpful tips for setting up and participating in a successful meeting. If you are unable to attend an in-person meeting, you can always call the Member’s district office to speak to a staff member and register your opinion.

**Work with partners:** As an advocate, you have a powerful voice, but your voice is amplified when you join with local partners to achieve your mutual goals. Consider inviting other local leaders like victim service providers, interfaith partners, clergy members, lay leaders in your church, synagogue, mosque, etc. to your meeting. If you have a relationship with a survivor of abuse who is comfortable sharing his/her story, bringing a survivor to the meeting is a very compelling way to make a case for VAWA programs and services.

**Setting up a meeting:** The Members of Congress will be in their districts for recess from August 6th through September 7th. This is a great time to request an in-person meeting with your Member. To set up a meeting, call your Member’s district office and ask the staff member how to submit a meeting request (you will most likely have to submit a meeting request via e-mail to his/her district scheduler with the necessary information). If you are unable to secure a meeting with the Member and can only meet with a staff person, it is still worthwhile to take the meeting.

**Prepare for your meeting:** Before you meet, look up how your Member voted on the Senate VAWA reauthorization bill (S.1925) or the House VAWA bill (H.R. 4970) this Congress. A vote for the Senate bill and against the House bill is the position that JWI supported. If your Member voted this way, thank him/her and if he/she didn’t, politely express your concerns. Before the visit, you should also decide on specific points you want to make during the meeting, practice a role play of the visit, and give yourself time to review your materials.

**Be on time:** Be sure to arrive on time, but be prepared to wait. Members often have multiple meetings and hearings scheduled on a single day and may be running late.

**Make an introduction:** Introduce yourself and your organization to the Member or staff. Be sure to mention how many clients/colleagues/members you or your organization has in their district or the state.

**State the purpose of your meeting:** Know what you want to talk about when you walk in the door. Keep your request short and state specifically what you want the member to do.

**Focus on local issues:** Personalize and localize your request as much as possible. You do not need to be an expert on VAWA, but it is very helpful if you can describe its impact on you, your organization, and your faith community. For example, try to reference the impact of VAWA funding and/or programs in your community or how many victims of violence there are in your state each year. Know why you want this legislation to pass and why the issue is important to you and your community.
**Tips for Meeting with Policymakers (continued)**

**State your position:** Make a specific ask. Tell the Member that you want, why you want it and ask him/her the position s/he intends to take on the issue. In this case, you want to request that your Member of Congress urge his/her Congressional leaders to pass a final VAWA reauthorization bill that protects all victims of violence.

**Ask how you can be helpful:** “How can the faith community be most effective in supporting your position?” Never promise anything you cannot deliver, but offer to do what is possible and helpful.

**You don’t have to be an expert:** Do not be afraid to say that you don’t know something. If someone asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, tell them you will find out the answer and get back to them with the information.

**Bring leave-behind material:** Feel free to bring a one-page fact sheet/summary of the issue, a one-pager on your organization with your contact information, and any group material (letter supporting VAWA signed by a local coalition) or public material (letter to the editor that was published). Please feel free to use the information in the fact sheet in this toolkit when you develop leave-behind material.

**Always follow up:** Thank the Member and staff for the meeting, get the staffer’s business card, and follow up with a thank you email. Be sure to use the note to remind the Member of the issue and the commitment he/she made to your cause. You may include collateral material. Present yourself as a resource in your local community for future activities or as a referral for information.
Calling Your Members of Congress: 
A Call Script for Advocates

Please [click here](#) to find the phone number of your Senators and Representative. When you call their Washington, DC or district offices, consider delivering the following talking points to the staff member or intern who answers your call:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am a constituent of Senator/Representative [insert name] from [insert name of hometown] and I would like you to relay my comments to the Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am calling today about the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act;</td>
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<tr>
<td>The House and Senate have passed different versions of the Violence Against Women Act but Congressional leaders have not come together to send a final bill to the President to sign;</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a member of my faith community [insert name here], I am extremely concerned that without a Violence Against Women Act reauthorization this Congress, victims of violence stand to lose critical protections and lifesaving services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I urge Senator/Representative [insert name] to speak to his/her party leadership today about working out the details of a final bill, one that includes protections for all victims of violence.</td>
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Sample Letter to the Editor

To The Editor:

Violence against women and children affects everyone in [name of local community] in some way. As a leader in [name your organization, church, temple, mosque, etc.], I know that the faith community plays a crucial role in supporting victims of violence in times of crisis and raising awareness about abuse in our community.

In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was a giant step forward for our nation. Its passage meant that our federal government finally acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence cause tremendous harm, and put resources into helping victims. Millions of families are better off as a result. VAWA has always been a bipartisan effort of Congress since it was first passed and evidence shows that VAWA is working. Over the last 18 years, domestic and sexual violence have declined. But there is more work to do. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 1 in 4 women has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner and 1 in 5 women will be raped in her lifetime.

The time has come again to reauthorize this critical legislation and continue VAWA’s successful programs while ensuring that more victims receive the lifesaving services they need. Yet Congress is allowing VAWA to fall prey to partisan gridlock. In recent months, the House and Senate have both passed different versions of a VAWA reauthorization bill and Congressional leaders have not sent a final bill to the President to sign. I am tremendously disappointed and ask our Members of Congress in [name your state] to urge their party leadership to come to an agreement on this critical legislation.

The safety and security of members of our community is at stake- and without the reauthorization of VAWA, victims of violence stand to lose lifesaving protections and resources.

Sincerely,
[Name, Title, Organization, Contact Info]
Using Social Media

Social media is a powerful way to communicate our messages to a wider audience. Below are sample tweets and Facebook posts you can use to raise awareness about the Violence Against Women Act and communicate directly with your elected officials and Congressional leaders.

**Facebook**

Sample post:

As a person of faith, I am calling on my Members of Congress to end the partisan stalemate and pass a final Violence Against Women Act reauthorization once and for all. VAWA saves lives and money and has always been a bipartisan effort of Congress since it was first passed in 1994. Without VAWA, victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking stand to lose lifesaving services and support.

**Twitter**

Sample tweets:

[Insert your Member of Congress’ Twitter handle]: Congress must end the gridlock on #VAWA today! Please work with Congressional leaders to #reauthorizeVAWA 4 all victims now!

1 in 4 women victim of severe physical violence in U.S. We need Congress 2 end stalemate & pass a final #VAWA that protects all victims!

1 in 5 women in US raped in their lifetime. Congress must end stalemate & pass final #VAWA 2 end sexual & domestic violence! #reauthorizevawa

As a person of faith, I am calling on Congress to #reauthorizeVAWA now so that all victims of violence can get the support they need #VAWA

Hashtags to use: #VAWA #RealVAWA #ReauthorizeVAWA

Congressional Leadership Twitter Handles:

@SenatorReid
@McConnellPress
@NancyPelosi
@johnboehner