



News from
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Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-34) Introduces the SAFE Act to Assist Victims of Domestic Violence Maintain Employment and Economic Stability

*Measure would help employers retain good employees and avoid recruiting
and training costs associated with domestic violence*

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA, 34) and Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX, 2) today introduced the Security and Financial Empowerment Act (SAFE – HR 2395) in order to give victims of domestic violence greater economic stability and to create a federal standard for employers to address the effects of domestic violence on employees.

“While physical and psychological consequences are the most obvious results of domestic violence, victims also suffer economically,” Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard said. “One of the key reasons victims stay with or return to their abusers is because they are financially dependent upon them. In order to break this cycle of dependence and abuse, I have introduced the SAFE Act to provide victims of domestic violence with greater employment protections and increased economic stability.”

Congressman Ted Poe (TX-02) said, "Victims of domestic violence have already suffered enough abuse at the hands of their batterers. They should not be victimized by their employers as well. The SAFE Act institutes policies and provisions that allow domestic violence victims to seek the help they need to end the abuse without fear of losing their jobs or fear of being denied employment. This is an essential piece of legislation that needs to be enacted swiftly for the sake of all domestic violence victims and survivors."

Under the SAFE Act, victims of domestic violence who are forced to leave a job because of the abuse would be eligible for unemployment benefits. They would also be able to take unpaid leave from work without the fear of being fired to address immediate needs such as obtaining legal assistance, medical care or to find a safe place to live.

More than half the states in the country – including California – already have state laws that extend unemployment compensation to victims of domestic violence in certain circumstances. Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard said, “The SAFE Act would replace the uneven and often insufficient protections offered by existing state laws with a federal standard that would apply uniformly throughout the nation.”

More specifically, the SAFE Act would do the following:

- Allow eligible employees to take up to 30 days of unpaid leave to handle domestic violence-related priorities such as finding a new place to live, obtaining medical care, seeking counseling and attending court appearances related to restraining orders and divorce and child custody proceedings.
- Allow victims who are forced to leave their jobs because of domestic violence to qualify for unemployment benefits.
- Prohibit employers from discriminating against victims of domestic violence in areas such as hiring, compensation and other conditions of employment.
- Prohibit insurance companies and employers from dropping insurance coverage of victims of domestic and sexual violence because of a fear of abuse-related insurance claims. The bill would also establish confidentiality guidelines regarding a victim's past injuries and treatment.

In a 1998 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress, GAO found that the effects of domestic violence on a woman's job performance can make it difficult for her to maintain employment or advance in her job. The GAO report provided statistics showing that almost half of victims of domestic violence lose their jobs because of the violence and almost 70 percent of victims feel that their job performance is negatively affected by the abuse. In addition, according to a 2003 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, the estimated costs of direct medical and mental health care services related to intimate partner violence total nearly \$4.1 billion a year, with an additional \$1.8 billion in productivity losses.

“Domestic violence is not only a personal tragedy, it negatively impacts employers as well, costing them significantly every year in sick leave, absenteeism, and loss of productivity,” Congresswoman Roybal-Allard said. “The SAFE Act is good for businesses because it reduces domestic violence-related absenteeism and lost productivity, saving businesses money. After all, when employers are able to retain staff, they improve morale and avoid recruitment and training costs.”

A longtime advocate on behalf of victims of domestic violence, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard has introduced this legislation in every Congress since 1996. An earlier provision of the SAFE Act creating a National Resource Center on Workplace Responses to Domestic Violence was enacted into law as part of the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. “Once federal funding is appropriated for the National Resource

Center, the center will provide employers with a resource for information and expertise needed to help their employees address the violence in their lives,” Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard said.

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