Dear Colleague:

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), one in five women has been raped in her lifetime and one in four women has been the victim of severe physical violence by a partner.

These shocking statistics confirm that the impact of domestic violence on society is enormous. Over 80 percent of women victimized experience significant short and long-term effects related to the violence, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), physical injury, and lost time at work or school. The survey also shows that rape and intimate partner violence is disproportionately experienced before the age of 24, highlighting the importance of early intervention and prevention programming.

For more than 25 years, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) have made substantial progress toward ending the incidence of domestic and sexual violence. Yet, as the NISVS numbers indicate, a robust federal commitment is needed to stop this violence and intergenerational cycle of abuse.

Since the passage of VAWA, we have seen a 50 percent reduction in domestic violence rates and an increased public awareness of these crimes. In the current economic climate, victim service agencies struggle to handle an increasing workload with fewer resources to assist victims. In 2010, domestic violence programs eliminated 2,000 staff positions nationwide, including counselors, advocates and children’s advocates; at least 19 shelters around the country closed since 2011. According to a 2012 survey, 65 percent of rape crisis centers had a waiting list for counseling services and 50 percent were forced to reduce staff.

To meet these challenges, we need to continue to support adequate funding to prevent and address incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. Congress recently reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, which responds to these difficult economic times by consolidating programs and adding accountability measures to ensure that federal funds are used cost-effectively.

We hope you will join us in supporting these critical investments in our communities that save lives, rebuild families, and prevent future crimes by signing the attached letter. To do so, please contact Kelsey Kobelt (Leahy) at Kelsey.Kobelt@judiciary-dem.senate.gov or 4-7703 or Susan Stoner at susan.stoner@crapo.senate.gov or 4-6142.

Sincerely,

PATRICK LEAHY

MIKE CRAPO
Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairwoman Mikulski, Senator Moran, and Senator Shelby:

As the Commerce, Justice, Science and the Labor, Health and Human Services Subcommittees consider their Fiscal Year 2014 priorities, we write to urge your protection of programs that serve victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Critical to this effort is maintaining support for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).

While we recognize the budget constraints you face, funding these programs brings substantial benefits by saving lives today and bringing long-term positive impacts, not just on the abused but also on children who witness violence against family members. Studies show that domestic violence has declined significantly since VAWA was first enacted in 1994. Furthermore, in its first six years, VAWA is estimated to have saved taxpayers at least $14.8 billion in net averted social costs. The current economic climate, however, has created a severe budget crisis for programs across the country that hold perpetrators accountable and provide safety and support for victims. According to a 2012 survey of rape crisis centers, 65 percent have a waiting list for counseling services and 50 percent were forced to reduce staff for budget shortfalls. In 2010, domestic violence programs eliminated 2,000 staff positions including counselors, advocates and children’s advocates; at least 19 shelters around the country closed since 2011.

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the first-ever National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), which found that domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking remain widespread. In fact, domestic violence alone affects more than 12 million people each year; nearly one in five women has been raped in her lifetime, and one in four women has been a victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner. Over 80 percent of women victimized experience significant short and long-term effects related to the violence, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), injury and lost time at work or school. The NISVS also shows rape and partner violence is disproportionately experienced before the age of 24, highlighting the importance of early intervention and prevention programming.

While state and private funding sources are dwindling, there are more incidents of violence and more victims looking for help. In 2009, though domestic violence programs funded by FVPSA provided shelter and nonresidential services to over 1 million victims, an additional 167,000 requests for life-saving shelter went unmet due to lack of capacity. We cannot allow the gap between available resources and the desperate need further to widen. We urge the Subcommittees to commit adequate resources toward these cost-effective, life-saving programs administered by the Office on Violence Against Women/Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services.
These programs are crucial investments in our society that save lives, rebuild families, protect children and teens, conserve taxpayer resource and prevent future crimes. We understand the serious budget constraints that face the subcommittees and the difficult choices that will need to be made. The VAWA and FVPSA programs meet national needs and priorities that can provided in fiscally-responsible appropriations measures. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,