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National Network to End Domestic Violence Applauds President Obama, Congress for Investment in Saving Lives

Washington, D.C. – The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) praised President Obama for signing last week a bill passed by the U.S. House and Senate that will better serve victims of domestic and sexual violence. The omnibus spending bill includes a total of \$113 million in increases for cost-effective programs that operate primarily under the Violence Against Women Act and the Victims of Crime Act.

“This expanded investment comes at a critical time,” said Sue Else, NNEDV’s president. “The economic downturn is exacerbating domestic violence, and survivors are left with fewer options for escape.” Else noted that the economy does not cause domestic violence but can make already-abusive relationships worse.

“A sour economy does to domestic violence what salt does to an open wound,” she said.

Across the country, those who serve survivors of domestic and sexual violence have been struggling to meet the up-tick in the demand for services as budgets are shrinking considerably. Many shelters and local programs have been forced to close their doors, lay off staff or reduce the number of services they offer.

Congress’ investment in life-saving services includes \$705 million for the Victims of Crime Act, \$189 million for the STOP (Services, Training, Officers, Prosecutors) grant program, \$41 million for the Civil Legal Assistance for Victims program, and \$15 million for the Sexual Assault Services Program. For the first time ever, the Supporting Teens through Education and Protection (STEP) program is being funded. Congress is also providing more than \$130 million in the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, which includes dedicated funding to serve children in domestic violence shelters.

“We extend our heartfelt thanks to President Obama and the members of the House and Senate who have stepped up to the plate to make this historic investment,” said Else. “Those who supported this life-saving funding are true champions for the survivors of domestic and sexual violence.”

NNEDV recognized a bipartisan group of lawmakers whose tireless efforts were instrumental in the passage of the bill. They include Senators Thad Cochran (R-MS), Tom Harkin (D-IA), Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Richard Shelby (R-AL) along with Representatives Bruce Braley (D-1-IA), Rosa DeLauro (D-3-CT), Jerry Lewis (R-41-CA), Alan Mollohan (D-1-WV), Gwen Moore (D-4-WI), David Obey (D-7-WI), Ted Poe (R-2-TX), Dave Reichert (R-8-WA), Todd Tiahrt (R-4-KS) and Frank Wolf (R-10-VA).

Still, more work is needed. While increases are steps in the right direction, they are not enough to bridge the gap between the increasing demand on services and resources to cover the costs. The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, in particular, requires additional resources to fully serve survivors and their children.

“NNEDV looks forward to working with President Obama and Congress to prioritize funding in the 2011 budget to secure support for programs that help victims fleeing from life-threatening violence,” Else said.

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NNEDV, a 501(c)(3) organization, is a leading voice for domestic violence victims and their allies. Its members include the 56 state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence. It works closely with them to understand the needs of domestic violence victims and advocacy programs. NNEDV has been a premiere national organization advancing the movement against domestic violence for the past 15 years, after leading efforts among domestic violence advocates and survivors in urging Congress to pass the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit www.nnedv.org.