



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The Connection between Personal and Economic Security

Personal safety and economic security are inextricably linked for victims of domestic violence. For many victims, concerns over their ability to provide financially for themselves and their children are a significant reason for staying in or returning to an abusive relationship. Even after a victim has left the abuser, ruined credit scores, sporadic employment histories and legal issues caused by the violence may also make it extremely difficult to pursue long-term economic security while staying safe. Simply put, when survivors of violence have stable access to resources that help them build economic resiliency – including things like paid sick and safe days, equal pay, access to the social safety net, safe and affordable housing, fair financial and loan access, and workplace safety – they and their families are much more likely to remain safe and secure.

Economic Security in the Workplace

In almost any workplace, there are likely to be individuals affected by domestic violence and/or sexual assault. Employees who are victims may need workplace supports to help keep themselves and their co-workers safe and productive:

- **Paid sick and safe days** legislation would permit victims to take time off of work to address the health consequences of violence or to attend to other critical safety needs such as filing for an order of protection or cooperating with law enforcement, without compromising their jobs or economic stability.
- **Non-discrimination** legislation would permit survivors to ask for important safety accommodations such as changing work hours, and would prohibit employers from firing employees because of their status as a victim of domestic or sexual violence.
- Access to **unemployment insurance** can significantly assist survivors in sustaining economic stability if they lose their jobs because of domestic or sexual violence, or need to relocate because of concerns about their safety or that of an immediate family member. While the majority of states, territories and the District of Columbia have enacted specific laws extending access to unemployment insurance to survivors of domestic violence (and in some instances, to survivors of sexual assault), some states do not afford this protection to victims. This variation, combined with the increasingly national or multi-state nature of workplaces, means that two survivors working side-by-side may not have access to the same protections if they live in different states. Federal legislation is necessary to remedy this fundamental inequity.
- Like all women, survivors of domestic and sexual violence (who are predominantly women), would benefit from **equal pay** initiatives. As long as women make less than men for performing the same work, survivors' ability to gain financial stability and independence is hampered, as the amount of time that a survivor might need to continue relying on support from an abuser could extend longer than necessary.
- An **increased minimum wage** would increase not only survivors' economic security but also their safety. Low-wage workers, who are predominantly women, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (for example, wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and domestic and sexual violence in the workplace). Limited skills, inadequate education, language ability, and immigration status may also make workers more vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to want to, or to be able to, challenge it for fear of retaliation, including job loss, sexual violence and deportation.

Safe and Affordable Housing

Victims of domestic violence often struggle to find permanent housing after fleeing dangerous situations. The majority of assaults and incidents of abuse occur in the survivor's home, often leading to an urgent need to flee. Experiencing domestic violence also often forces women and children into homelessness. Over 90% of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and 63% have been victims of domestic violence as adults.

Policies that increase safe, affordable housing and access to emergency and transitional housing help to prevent homelessness and keep survivors stable. Federal housing, homelessness initiatives, and vouchers programs, including those that specifically address domestic violence, need sufficient funding to close the gap between desperate need and available resources. Additionally, the HEARTH Act (HUD homeless programs) regulations and funding distribution should be responsive to the unique confidentiality and safety needs of survivors. Finally, Congress and the Administration must ensure swift implementation of the landmark housing protections in the Violence Against Women Act of 2013. Currently, Congress has the opportunity to help implement VAWA housing protections by adding \$40 million to the tenant protection account for up to 5,000 vouchers for VAWA emergency transfers. This would help implement a lifesaving VAWA provision that requires housing authorities and landlords to develop emergency transfer policies.

Affordable Childcare

Because of a lack of options in the community, many domestic violence survivors often rely on their abusive partners or ex-partners, or the abuser's family members, to provide childcare. This can place survivors in danger of further or increased physical and/or emotional abuse. Also, abusers may intentionally cancel or change their plans to provide childcare as a tactic to interfere with the victim's work. Having access to affordable, quality childcare will greatly increase victims' safety.

Social Safety Net Benefits

Access to social safety nets like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (including Family Violence Option waivers), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are critical in providing increased economic stability for survivors. Many victims remain in abusive relationships or unsafe situations because they cannot afford to leave. When victims do flee, many do so without any financial resources. Maintaining and improving these programs helps to address the basic financial needs and rights of survivors and their children and significantly improves survivors' ability to find safety, while building long-term security for themselves and their children.