TALKING POINTS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

• As we recognize October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act and the 25th anniversary of the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

• The Violence Against Women Act is the landmark federal legislation that provides key funding for the justice system’s responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence.

• The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act is the lifeblood of domestic violence shelters and programs across the country.

• The Violence Against Women Act, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, and state and local laws are making a difference in countless lives, especially in a time of financial crisis.

• The economic downturn is exacerbating domestic violence.
  o The economy does not cause domestic violence, but in abusive relationships, factors associated with a bad economy can increase the frequency and severity of abuse.

• While the demand for domestic violence services is going up, funding for them is going down.
  o Governmental entities, corporations and individuals are tightening their budgets and are funding life-saving programs at reduced levels across the nation.
  o We are appalled that the governor of California completely eliminated state funding for domestic violence services. Other states have seen funding reductions, but California represents the most extreme and shocking example.

• In recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, let us renew efforts to invest in life-saving shelters and non-residential domestic violence services.

• The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act is the only dedicated federal funding source for emergency shelters, crisis hotlines, advocacy programs, counseling and comprehensive victim assistance.
• Research shows that staying at a shelter or working with a domestic violence expert significantly reduces the likelihood that a victim would be abused again and improved the victim’s quality of life.

• Shelters are effective and efficient.
  o The University of Connecticut and National Resource Center on Domestic Violence published a groundbreaking study of shelter services (Funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, Family Violence Prevention and Services Program, administered by the National Institute of Justice)
  o It captured the experience of 3,410 shelter residents in 215 programs in 8 states.
  o 99% reported getting the safety they needed; 95% got help with safety planning
  o 99% got emotional support (counseling, access to faith community, etc.)
  o 93% got help finding housing, job training, managing money, etc.
  o 99% of mothers got safety for children, children’s counseling, health care assistance, and child care

• The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act has been extremely successful. The problem is that it has never been fully funded. It was written in 1984 and needs to be updated to reflect current best practices.

• A reauthorization bill should build upon its successes and expand its reach to all underserved populations.

CURRENT FVPSA FUNDING SIMPLY CANNOT MEET THE NEED FOR SERVICES. FVPSA NEEDS TO BE FULLY FUNDED IN FY 2010

• The demand for services increases with improvements in criminal justice responses, better outreach and increased awareness.
• Use national/state DV Counts 2008 Census numbers to demonstrate the demand for and gap in services and provide local information about the need created by the economic crisis. http://nnedv.org/resources/census/232-census2008.html

RESPONDING TO CLAIMS FROM OPPOSITION GROUPS

Claim: Domestic violence laws represent a reduction in civil rights for those wrongfully accused of perpetrating domestic violence.

Response: The Violence Against Women Act represents a protection of rights for survivors of domestic abuse. It protects victims’ fundamental right to safety when faced with abuse.

Claim: Orders of protection can be issued even without any allegation of physical violence.
Response: Orders of protection are issued in response to physical violence or a credible threat to cause harm, as determined by a judge who weighs the available evidence. They are issued in accordance with due process, as the U.S. Constitution requires. Orders of protection are not a conviction. They are put into place to prevent future violence.

Claim: Allegations of abuse are often recanted because victims cannot produce evidence of the alleged abuse.

Response: Survivors, more often than not, recant allegations out of fear of retaliation from their abusers, not lack of evidence.

Claim: Men and women are equally likely to be the victims of domestic abuse.

Response: Men can be victims of partner abuse, but they represent a minority of cases. We know that 85 percent of the victims are females abused by male partners; they are 90 to 95 percent more likely to be the victims of abuse than are men. (Bureau of Justice Statistics and the U.S. Dept. of Justice)

Claim: Mandatory arrest policies violate the Constitution and increase the safety risk for victims.

Response: Arrest policies outlined in the Violence Against Women Act do not violate the Constitution. They are based on probable cause.

Key to holding perpetrators accountable is good training for law enforcement to identity the predominant aggressor and avoid arresting victims. The Violence Against Women Act provides critical support for such training.