The National Network to End Domestic Violence today commemorates the 18th Anniversary of the passage of the Violence Against Women Act. This landmark law, passed in 1994, has forever transformed and improved our nation’s response to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking.

VAWA supports effective coordinated community responses, leveraging state and local resources to address and prevent these serious and pervasive crimes. Such coordinated community responses have been at the heart of our nation’s progress toward reducing domestic and sexual violence. Since VAWA first passed, more victims feel comfortable coming forward, crime rates have decreased, laws against domestic violence have been strengthened, and communities across the country are safer and more secure.

VAWA has been reauthorized twice since 1994 and each reauthorization has built upon the successes of the past and improved coverage, protection and services for victims. Despite successes, VAWA has expired – jeopardizing current protections and failing to address important safety issues. In 2012, Congress must pass a strong, bipartisan VAWA reauthorization that safely and effectively protects all victims. Specifically, it must include protections to meet the urgent needs of Native American women, immigrants, LGBT victims, those on college campuses and Communities of Color. The law must reauthorize the key grant programs in order to improve and expand services to victims in need. It must build upon the landmark housing protections that ensure victims are not evicted from subsidized housing based on the abusive actions of their perpetrators. It must efficiently support local programs to ensure the stability of services to victims.

“Today as VAWA turns 18, we consider the young people born in 1994 who will benefit from VAWA but know that it falls short to meet their needs and many other victims’ needs,” said Paulette Sullivan Moore, Vice President of Public Policy at the National Network to End Domestic Violence. “We must continue to improve the protections under VAWA in order to ensure that they, and all victims, will be safe from violence and abuse. Without a strong VAWA reauthorization, such protections are still not available.”

Eighteen years ago, the state coalitions formed NNEDV to lead the effort to pass the Violence Against Women Act. Today, NNEDV continues to work to make domestic violence a national priority, change the way communities respond to domestic violence, and strengthen efforts against domestic violence at every level of government. As the representative of the 56 state and territorial domestic violence coalitions and in partnership with a strong group of national organizations, NNEDV continues to serve as a leading voice for domestic violence victims and their allies, working to ensure that the promise and potential of the Violence Against Women Act is fulfilled.