The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), first authorized in 1994, is at the core of our nation's response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking and creates and supports comprehensive, effective and cost saving responses.

Underserved populations have been addressed in VAWA since 1994. *The Leahy/Crapo Bill (S.1925)* offers an enhanced gateway for greater reach to underserved populations through an improved underserved definition, a restructured underserved populations grant program and specific supports throughout VAWA for underserved populations.

**ENHANCED UNDERSERVED GRANT PROGRAM:** The existing Grants for Outreach and Services Program has been restructured in S.1925 to provide resources for planning, evaluation and implementation to strengthen services to un-served, underserved and inadequately served populations. This grant program will also continue to support public education about domestic, sexual, dating violence and stalking within communities and neighborhoods that are often overlooked in public awareness initiatives.

**IMPROVED UNDERSERVED DEFINITION:** The Underserved definition S.1925 has been expanded to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and faith. In one study, nearly half of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) victims were turned away from domestic violence shelters due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and nearly a quarter are mis-arrested as the primary aggressor by local law enforcement.¹ More than 55% of LGBTQ survivors were denied orders of protection and only 7% of all LGBTQ victims reported violence to the police.² In fact, studies have shown that only one in five survivors of same-gender sexual assault and intimate partner violence received victim services.³ Victims from faith-based communities will often contact their faith leaders or go to their places of worship before they will contact a domestic violence program. Religious organizations can reach the large numbers of people often underserved by other groups with messages of safety and support for victim issues.⁴

**Underserved Populations also need…**

**GATEWAYS:** With these unique challenges, reluctance to seek support, and few gateways to services, victims often look for assistance from programs in their neighborhoods such as youth centers, senior centers, immigrant and cultural organizations or vocational organizations. These programs are often designed to specifically serve the community with which the victim identifies. Many of these programs have the track record of serving victims of violence but need the opportunity to plan and strengthen their services, to implement improved and enhanced assistance, and to evaluate their progress. It is critical that the Underserved enhancements listed above and the additional provisions listed below are adopted collectively because they target multiple needs across underserved communities and complement each other.

**AMENDED TITLE IX:** S.1925 amends a title added in 2005 specifically dedicated to addressing the epidemic rates of violence against Native American women, Title IX, the Safety for Indian Women title. S.1925 provides tribal-specific amendments that would improve Title IX and enhance the safety of Native women by increasing access to culturally appropriate victim services and programs that will hold perpetrators accountable.

**CLARIFYING SUPPORT FOR ALL VICTIMS REGARDLESS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY:** S.1925 clarifies that it includes protections and services for LGBTQ victims, who are under-served and often face discrimination when accessing services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**IMPROVED CULTURALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES PROGRAM:** VAWA 2005 also specifically broadens the definition of “who” is eligible to provide violence against women services. These provisions are critically needed to ensure that communities of color have access to local services that provide culturally and linguistically appropriate community-based interventions.

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2 Id.
3 Id.