



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence Against Women Act Recommendations for the 2011 Reauthorization

**Submitted by:
National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence**

Background

During the spring and summer of 2009, more than 20 different working groups led by advocates working to end violence against women came together to analyze how the Violence Against Women Act is working in communities and to make recommendations in preparation for the 2011 reauthorization. The working groups addressed the existing titles of the legislation, such as sexual assault services or children/youth, as well as emerging areas in need of response, such as meeting the needs of victims in same sex relationships. In general, most felt VAWA was doing a good job, and the most significant critiques were simply the need for more funding and the expansion of VAWA programs to help more and more diverse communities. The following is a summary of the recommendations from the working groups. For a copy of the more detailed summaries from each of the various groups, please contact the National Network to End Domestic Violence, 202-543-5566 or the chairs of each working group, which are included as an appendix to this document.

Working Groups

The working groups developed to inform this process were: Americans Living Overseas, Children and Youth, Communities of Color, Women with Disabilities, Economic Security/Workplace, Faith, Health, Housing, Immigrants, International, Justice System, Abuse in Later life/Elder, LGBTQ, Military, Offenders, Prevention, Privacy and Technology, Research, Services, Sexual Assault, Tribal, Underserved Communities.

Summary

The Violence Against Women Act has provided truly life-saving assistance to hundreds of thousands of women and men since it was first passed more than 15 years ago. Though it initially focused almost exclusively on improving the legal and law enforcement response to the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, it has evolved through the last two reauthorizations to expand its focus to better meet the needs of victims and better address the needs of victims of multiple crimes including dating violence and stalking. During the last reauthorization, VAWA expanded its reach by targeting services to Native American women and immigrant women. It included a new program specifically funding services for sexual assault victims and also included new programs focusing on prevention, men and boys, and the needs of teens and youth who are victims of dating violence. The general consensus was that these programs should continue and

that VAWA should be reauthorized and amended to reach into even more marginalized communities, those who often remain isolated, or for whom traditional services don't meet their needs. Some new programs in VAWA also remain untested because they have yet to be funded or funding has not been awarded despite appropriations. In those situations, the working groups focused on the intent of the programs and made recommendations based on their potential.

To summarize, the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, recommends that the Violence Against women Act be reauthorized and amended to:

- Ensure that core victim services continue and that all four crimes – sexual assault, dating violence, stalking and domestic violence – are addressed across the spectrum of VAWA programs and titles.
- Ensure that services to address all four crimes reach victims who aren't currently being served or could be better served by community-based programs, including Americans living abroad, women with disabilities, teens and youth, elder victims, LGBT men and women, rural communities and immigrants. The needs of communities of color also must be prioritized and not lost within the broader rubric of underserved communities.
- Because Native women still continue to experience some of the highest rates, particularly of sexual violence, the Task Force recommends continuing to set aside a portion of funds specifically targeting American Indian and Alaskan Native women.
- Teen dating violence and the sexual abuse and exploitation of children – many of whom run away or end up in the juvenile justice system – must be more intentionally addressed as no new resources have actually been distributed to address these issues even though teens and youth experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence and most sexual assault victims are under the age of 18.
- Prevention programs must grow and expand. These include programs focused on primary prevention directed at men and boys as well as women and girls, and services for children who have been exposed to violence. In addition, existing prevention programs focused on domestic violence or sexual assault need to be better integrated at the state level.
- The use of technology as a tool of abuse and the potential of technology to be helpful needs to be better addressed, and privacy and confidentiality protections need to be strengthened further given the instantaneous and potentially dangerous consequences of even minor breaches of privacy.
- More research is needed to evaluate the existing programs being funded and to see what is working, particularly community-based interventions targeting cultural or linguistic minority communities. Original research must also be funded that identifies the most effective interventions for preventing and responding to violence against women in various settings, including the health care setting.

- Funding should continue for programs that work with other systems and community supports that can help women be safe and recover from violence. This includes housing and economic supports as well as training for health care providers, judges, the child welfare system and employers.
- As military families continue to feel the strain of future deployments as well as the physical and emotional trauma experienced by many returning veterans, it is imperative that the Services and the Department of Defense set aside targeted funding to meet the needs of service members and family members who have been victimized by physical and sexual abuse. In addition, it is essential that programs be put in place to help prevent physical and sexual abuse both in the field and back in the United States before it occurs.
- Holding offenders accountable and developing effective methods for reducing recidivism is crucial for reducing all four crimes. VAWA funding should continue to support law enforcement and support victims charged with crimes as a result of their abuse, programs to improve parenting after abuse, and interventions that prevent these crimes.

While this list is by no means exhaustive, it represents the Task Force's best efforts to capture the needs of victims as well as the expertise of the field. We respectfully share these and ask for their full consideration as the Congress and Administration work toward the next reauthorization of VAWA.