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## **REAUTHORIZE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT, EXPERTS TELL CONGRESS**

Speaking before a packed room at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Tuesday, actress Salma Hayek and former Boston Celtic M.L. Carr joined experts on domestic, dating and sexual violence and stalking in urging Congress to quickly reauthorize the *Violence Against Women Act*.

“We have a duty to help heal the pain of our sisters and our mothers and our friends,” said Hayek, a spokesperson for the Avon Foundation. “It is imperative that we continue to provide public outreach and education to the many cultures and communities that flourish in the United States, in their own languages and in ways that are respectful of the worlds they inhabit.”

“As a professional basketball player and coach, I saw firsthand the opportunity that sports figures and coaches have to influence youth, and I saw what can happen when young people don’t have positive role models,” Carr told the Committee. “The *Violence Against Women Act of 2005* aims to open the necessary dialogue and extend the opportunity to shape our children’s future to every concerned adult.” Carr is President and CEO of Warm2Kids, and a member of the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) board of directors.

### **Lawmakers Express Support**

“This is not the time to scale back our efforts,” Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) said. “Instead, Congress must usher the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)* into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and plant the seeds with the next generation of children who must be taught that abuse will not be tolerated.”

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) added, “*VAWA* has succeeded for two important reasons. First, it sends a powerful message that domestic violence is a national problem. Second, it promotes a coordinated approach to domestic violence, respectful of state authority, that brings together federal agencies with local law enforcement and service providers.”

Reauthorizing *VAWA* would continue essential programs; fund services for victims of sexual assault; help children and youth who experience or witness violence; address the needs of victims from communities of color; aid immigrant and tribal victims; and support prevention, health, housing and economic security programs designed to stop violence and help victims.

*VAWA* will expire in September unless Congress acts. Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE), Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) introduced the bill in the Senate in June. It has 43 Senate co-sponsors.

Representatives Mark Green (R-WI), John Conyers (D-MI), Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL) and Hilda Solis (D-CA) introduced a similar version of *VAWA* in the House of Representatives in June.

### **Expert Witnesses**

“In response to overwhelming need, the *Violence Against Women Act of 2005* would provide increased resources to serve sexual assault victims,” National Center for Victims of Crime Executive Director Mary Lou Leary testified. “This historic legislation would strengthen our ability to stop stalkers... With the support of Congress and the frontline work of thousands of advocates and criminal justice professionals across the country, Americans can be confident that we will build on our success, expand our reach, and work to end sexual assault, stalking, domestic and dating violence.”

“The goal of ending domestic violence is an ambitious one, but one that can be reached,” National Network to End Domestic Violence Executive Director Lynn Rosenthal told the Committee. “I urge Congress to fulfill your commitment to victims of domestic violence by

reauthorizing the *Violence Against Women Act* to ensure that the progress made will continue and that domestic violence will be eradicated.”

Other witnesses were Diane Stuart, Director, Office of Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice and Ted Sexton, President, National Sheriff’s Association.

## **Opposition**

As many expected, opponents of *VAWA* attended the hearing as well. The ultra-conservative Eagle Forum released a statement from its President, Phyllis Schlafly. It says, in part, “It’s a mystery why Republicans continue to put a billion dollars a year of taxpayers’ money into the hands of radical feminists who use it [to] preach their anti-marriage and anti-male ideology, promote divorce, corrupt the family court system, and engage in liberal political advocacy ... *VAWA* encourages women to make false allegations, and then petition for full custody and denial of all fathers’ rights to see their own children ... It’s time to stop *VAWA* from spending any more taxpayers’ money to promote family dissolution and fatherless children.”

The American Coalition for Fathers & Children issued an open letter signed by 13 leaders asking Congress to significantly modify *VAWA* because it “hurts families, funds political advocacy, violates the Bill of Rights, denies citizens the equal protection of the law, and politicizes law enforcement.” The “leaders” represented the American Family Association, GOPbloggers.com, Let Freedom Ring and Renew America, among other groups.

No Senators acknowledged the opponents or their materials, and Men’s Resources International released a pro-*VAWA* declaration signed by more than 800 men from 44 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

*More information on VAWA is available at [www.endabuse.org/vawa](http://www.endabuse.org/vawa)*