



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT 2005

RESPONDING TO COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Violence against women is a significant social and health issue across the country that impacts all people regardless of age, culture or socio-economic status. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has been monumental in addressing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Over the last 25 years we have made tremendous strides in ending violence against women, but too often racial and ethnic minorities have lacked access to services. Organizations that serve victims of sexual assault, domestic violence or stalking often struggle to meet the needs of communities of color. The complexities of addressing violence against women within cultural communities are vast and cannot be dealt with merely by outreach programs or cultural competency trainings. The lives of women of color intersect with other issues including health care, immigration, and economics. To truly meet these needs, we must give communities of color the opportunity to assume leadership for developing culturally appropriate services for their communities.

For example, women of color often do not seek services for fear of becoming isolated from their communities; in effect victims may be forced to choose their communities over their safety. No person should have to make that choice. Instead, we must provide services that both embrace a woman's culture and her safety needs as a victim. Culturally-specific services, in a victim's native language, from a service provider within the victim's own culture, must be a core service offered to all victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

To achieve this success, we must ensure that communities of color themselves create and provide services, interventions and preventions in their own communities. Partnering with existing community entities will not only streamline service provisions but also ensure the efficient use of resources. Recognizing the importance of community developed and culturally-specific services, VAWA 2005 must contain carefully crafted provisions woven throughout the titles.

THESE PROVISIONS WOULD:

- Expand the definition of victim service providers to ensure culturally-specific, community-based organizations the opportunity to access federal funds that address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.
- Include language ensuring that the needs of racial and ethnic populations are added to underserved communities and that the funds are adequately distributed.
- Require service providers, courts and law enforcement facilities to be equipped with trained bicultural and bilingual interpreters and translators.
- Extend more services to immigrant populations, generate increased housing options, and increase the availability of bilingual/bicultural staff and materials.
- Foster collaboration between culturally-specific community organizations and domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking organizations.
- Provide for the development of direct sexual assault services by culturally-specific community organizations.
- Extend protections to individuals working in welfare-to-work programs to prevent them from losing their jobs as a result of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.
- Ensure that existing forms of immigration relief are available for domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking victims through technical corrections to current immigration law.
- Authorize a grant program for the development of curricula and demonstration projects that support prisoner re-entry and mentoring programs to help prisoners with a history of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual

assault or stalking reconnect with their families and communities as appropriate and become mutually respectful non-violent partners.

- Include language throughout the bill requiring grantees to collaborate with representatives from racial, ethnic and other underserved communities and survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking when developing and implementing new VAWA-funded programs such as housing and prevention.
- Focus on reaching racial and ethnic communities and immigrants through public education efforts and conduct public education initiatives in conjunction with culturally-specific, community-based organizations.
- Address the safety needs of survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in subsidized housing.
- Require grant applicants to document how their programs are reaching racial, ethnic and other underserved communities and to include this information in their plans and reports.
- Include a prevention section to address specific concerns of racial and ethnic communities.
- Allocate grant money for collaborative efforts between domestic violence groups and child welfare services to encourage a multi-layered response to the issues of racial, ethnic and other underserved communities.
- Ensure all United States Territories receive equitable coalition set-aside and other funding in their efforts to address issues of violence.

The programs described here are proposals under consideration for inclusion in the VAWA reauthorization bill that Members of Congress will introduce in early 2005. As the bill has not been finalized, we cannot be certain that the proposals will be included as described in this document.