

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: CONTACT: HELEN MACHADO
November 1, 2007 (202) 225-1766

News from

U.S. Congresswoman

LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD

34th District, California

2330 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-1766

255 East Temple Street, Suite 1860, Los Angeles, CA 90012, (213) 628-9230

Congresswoman Roybal-Allard and Congressman Poe Take Steps This Week to Advance SAFE Act

***Newly introduced measures would assist survivors of domestic
violence in maintaining employment and economic stability***

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA, 34) and Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX, 2) introduced the Job Protection for Survivors Act, the Insurance Non-Discrimination for Survivors Act, and the Unemployment Insurance for Survivors Act on October 31. The measures would give survivors of domestic violence greater economic stability and create a federal standard for employers to address the effects of domestic violence on employees.

The three bills are based on the Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act, which Congresswoman Roybal-Allard has introduced in every Congress since 1996, to promote financial security for survivors of domestic violence. In 2005, one of the provisions of the SAFE Act, the National Resource Center on Workplace Responses to domestic violence was included in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA Reauthorization). These three bills incorporate the remaining individual provisions of the SAFE Act, with some important changes in order to more fully meet the needs of both survivors and employers.

“While physical and psychological consequences are the most obvious results of domestic violence, victims also suffer economically,” Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard said. “One of the key reasons victims stay with or return to their abusers is because they are financially dependent upon them. In order to break this cycle of dependence and abuse, I have introduced these bills to provide victims of domestic violence with greater employment protections and increased economic stability.”

Congressman Ted Poe (TX-02) said, “Victims of domestic violence have already suffered enough abuse at the hands of their batterers. They should not be victimized by their employers as well. These bills institute policies and provisions that allow domestic violence victims to seek the help they need to end the abuse without fear of losing their jobs or fear of being denied employment. These are essential pieces of legislation that need to be enacted swiftly for the sake of all domestic violence victims and survivors.”

Under these bills, victims of domestic violence who are forced to leave a job because of the abuse would be eligible for unemployment benefits. They would also be able to take unpaid leave from work without the fear of being fired to address immediate needs such as obtaining legal assistance, medical care or to find a safe place to live.

More than half the states in the country – including California – already have state laws that extend unemployment compensation to victims of domestic violence in certain circumstances. Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard said, “These bills would replace the uneven and often insufficient protections offered by existing state laws with a federal standard that would apply uniformly throughout the nation.”

A more specific description of each bill appears below.

The Job Protection for Survivors Act (H.R. 4015)

- allows a domestic violence survivor to take up to 15 days off from work to receive medical attention, seek legal assistance, and get help with safety planning.
- allows a survivor to take leave to participate in court proceedings related to the abuse for the duration of the trial.
- protects employees from being fired because they were harassed by their abuser, obtained protective orders, participated in the criminal or civil justice process, or sought modifications at work to increase workplace safety in response to domestic or sexual violence.

The Insurance Non-Discrimination for Survivors Act (H.R. 4014)

- prohibits employers or insurance providers from basing hiring or coverage decisions on a victim’s history of abuse.

The Unemployment Insurance for Survivors Act (H.R. 4016)

- ensures that survivors can retain the financial independence necessary to leave their abusers without relying on welfare by requiring that states provide unemployment benefits to those terminated due to circumstances stemming from domestic violence.