

**Ask Senator Kirk to Co-Sponsor
Two Bills that Support Domestic and Sexual Violence Survivors:
VAWA Reauthorization and
the Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act
The Time to Act is Now!**

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), enacted in 1994, recognizes the insidious and pervasive nature of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, and supports *comprehensive, effective and cost saving* responses to these crimes. VAWA must be swiftly reauthorized to ensure a continued federal response.

Congress has a few choices. It can pass legislation that would reauthorize VAWA as is, and not include any new provisions that improve programs and cover more survivors; it can pass legislation that would reauthorize VAWA with many improvements (including some new housing provisions); or it can pass legislation that would reauthorize VAWA (either “as is” or the version with improvements) and also pass an amendment--the Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act--which would do even more to strengthen the housing protections for victims.

What Congress should do is pass the version of VAWA with improvements and the amendment with greater housing protections. Currently, U.S. Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois is not a sponsor on either of these bills.

VAWA Reauthorization

While VAWA programs greatly enhanced systemic changes to meet the needs of victims and have saved countless lives, more work still needs to be done. VAWA’s reauthorization will build upon its successes and continue progress towards breaking the cycle and culture of violence by:

- Streamlining programs and increasing accountability;
- Supporting coordinated, community-based responses and direct services for victims;
- Enhancing criminal justice responses to the crime of sexual assault;
- Strengthening housing protections for victims;
- Providing services and prevention programs for young people including those on college campuses;
- Giving law enforcement tools to hold offenders accountable in cases where the victim is from another country; and

- Improving the response to violence against Indian women and other underserved communities.

Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont plans to introduce legislation very soon that reauthorizes VAWA which includes these improvements. Please contact Senator Kirk today and ask him to support the bill and to add his name as an original co-sponsor of Senator Leahy's VAWA reauthorization legislation.

Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act

VAWA has been fundamental in establishing the housing rights of those who have experienced domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Yet more protections are needed to ensure that all survivors are provided safe shelter and do not have to choose between their safety and a place to live.

Provisions that will help protect the rights of survivors and ensure the security of one of the most basic needs, housing, include:

- Extending the protections of VAWA to include survivors of sexual assault;
- Extending equal protections for survivors living in all types of subsidized housing. The type of assistance that an individual receives should not dictate the extent of their protections under VAWA.
- Ensuring that those who are protected under VAWA and receive subsidized housing have the ability to transfer out of unsafe housing and move into safe, subsidized housing.

Senator Franken of Minnesota has just introduced the Housing Rights of Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act, a bill that will amend VAWA to include these new provisions. The housing provisions in this bill are a big improvement on the provisions in Senator Leahy's bill. The bill number is S. 1892. Ask Senator Kirk to support S. 1892 and to add his name as a co-sponsor.

Contact U.S. Senator Mark Kirk Now

Please take a few minutes to act on these two important pieces of legislation. The first is legislation that would reauthorize VAWA with additional provisions to ensure the safety and well-being of survivors—ask Senator Kirk if he would be an original co-sponsor with Senator Leahy (the bill has not been introduced, so there is no bill number yet). The second bill is the Housing Rights for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act. The bill number is S. 1892. Ask Senator Kirk to add his name as a co-sponsor.

You can contact Senator Kirk's office by phone at 202-224-2854, FAX at 202-228-4611, or via Internet at http://kirk.senate.gov/?p=comment_on_legislation. If you prefer to contact his Chicago office, the phone number is 312-886-3506, and FAX is 312-886-2117. Thank you.

For more information contact Wendy Pollack, Director, Women's Law and Policy Project, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, at wendypollack@povertylaw.org, or Kate Walz, Director, Housing Justice, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, at katewalz@povertylaw.org.