March 23, 2012
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Chairwoman
The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member
The Honorable Richard Shelby, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Members Shelby and Hutchison:

As the Commerce, Justice, Science and the Labor, Health and Human Services Committees consider their FY13 priorities, we want to thank you for your leadership in protecting programs in the last fiscal year that serve victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. As you continue to face funding challenges, we respectfully urge you to maintain support for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA). These programs save both lives and money.

While we recognize the budget constraints you face, we believe that funding these programs brings substantial benefits - saving lives today and bringing long-term positive impacts, not just on those being abused but also on children who witness violence against family members. Studies show that domestic violence has declined significantly since VAWA was first enacted in 1994. In its first six years, VAWA is estimated to have saved taxpayers at least $14.8 billion in net averted social costs. The current economic climate, however, has created a severe budget crisis for programs that hold perpetrators accountable and provide safety and support for victims across the country. According to a 2010 survey of rape crisis centers, 25% have a waiting list for basic services and 57% were forced to reduce staff. In 2010, domestic violence programs laid off or did not replace 2,000 staff positions including counselors, advocates and children's advocates, and at least 16 shelters around the country closed in 2009.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the first-ever National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS survey) which found that domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking are widespread. In fact, domestic violence alone affects more than 12 million people each year; nearly one in five women have been raped in their lifetime, and one in four women have been a victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner. Over 80% of women who were victimized experienced significant short and long-term impacts related to the violence, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), injury (42%) and missed time at work or school (28%). The NISVS study also shows that most rape and partner violence is experienced before the age of 24, highlighting the importance of early intervention and prevention programming.

At the same time that state and private funding sources are dwindling, there are more incidents of violence and more victims looking for help. In 2009, though domestic violence programs funded by FVPSA provided shelter and nonresidential services to over 1 million victims, an additional 167,069 requests for life-saving shelter went unmet due to lack of capacity. We cannot allow the gap between available resources and the desperate need to widen. We urge the Committee to commit adequate resources toward these effective, life-saving programs, and provide as much funding as possible for VAWA programs administered by the Office on Violence Against Women/Department of Justice; and FVPSA programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.
These programs are crucial investments in our society that save lives, rebuild families, protect children and teens, conserve taxpayer resource and prevent future crimes. Again, we are grateful for your support in the past, and urge you to protect and support VAWA and FVPSA.

Sincerely,

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator

CARL LEVIN
United States Senator

SCOTT BROWN
United States Senator

MAX BAUCUS
United States Senator

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
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JOHN F. KERRY
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