VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT INTRODUCED IN SENATE

Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE), Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) introduced the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 in the United States Senate on June 8. The bill, which was first enacted in 1994 and re-authorized in 2000, will expire in September unless Congress acts.

“These three Senators did a great service to the nation by introducing a strong Violence Against Women Act (VAWA),” said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. “If it is fully funded, this bill can do a tremendous amount to prevent violence of all kinds, and to help victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.”

“The bill we are introducing today provides a comprehensive approach to combating domestic violence,” Senator Biden said. “It stiffens penalties for repeat offenders, provides more money for vital services, and will help battered women get the assistance and support they need. It also focuses on breaking the cycle of violence through education and helping rural victims in under-served areas.”

Co-sponsors of the new bill, S. 1197, are Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Mike DeWine (R-OH), Charles Grassley (R-IA), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Herb Kohl (D-WI), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Charles Schumer (D-NY).

Details of Legislation
VAWA 2005 would continue essential programs and enhance the civil and criminal justice response to violence. It would increase funding to $5 million per year to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, and create a new dedicated grant program for sexual assault victims that will strengthen the 1,300 rape crisis centers across the country.

“VAWA has achieved so much over the past ten years to enhance justice and community responses to violence against women,” said Marybeth Carter, President of the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence. “We are especially pleased about the new Sexual Assault Services Act, which provides the first funding exclusively focused on support services for victims of sexual assault.”

The bill also includes measures to promote collaboration between domestic violence experts and child welfare agencies, and to strengthen the health care system’s response to family violence with programs to train and educate health care professionals, foster family violence screening for patients, and study the health ramifications of family violence.

It would provide money for programs to support children exposed to violence, for training and curricula development for home visitation programs on domestic violence, and to engage men and youth in preventing violence.

VAWA 2005 includes provisions that would address the needs of victims of trafficking, victims from communities of color, and immigrant and tribal victims. It would support several housing and economic security programs to stop violence and help victims.

VAWA continued on page six…
OUTREACH

Advocates can help convince Congress to quickly re-authorize the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 by reaching out to lawmakers and the media. Following are talking points on the bill, a sample letter to Congress, sample letter-to-the-editor, and a sample oped piece (guest editorial). Please personalize and localize each piece as appropriate, and submit them. Timely and consistent advocacy can make a difference!

Talking Points

- The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) was a giant step forward for our nation. Its passage meant that our federal government finally acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence cause tremendous harm to our society, and put real resources into helping victims. Millions of women, children and families are better off as a result.
- This historic measure increased options for victims and made it possible for many women to leave abusive relationships. It also improved the criminal justice system's response to violence by training police and prosecutors to respond more effectively.
- VAWA is gender-neutral. Since it was first passed, the law has provided immeasurable help to women, children and men.
- In 2000, Congress reauthorized VAWA, continuing the essential work begun in 1994 and adding important services for immigrant, rural, disabled and older women.
- VAWA is working. Over the last decade, we have finally begun to make progress as domestic and sexual violence have begun to decline. We need to continue this essential work.
- VAWA will expire this year. If Congress does not reauthorize it, and increase funding, these gains could well be reversed. Efforts to promote prevention will diminish and victims will suffer.
- There is much work still to do. On average in America each day, husbands or boyfriends murder three women. More than 700 women are raped or sexually assaulted. Countless children witness the violence.
- We need to continue assisting law enforcement and giving women the supportive services – such as housing, trained health care providers and job security – that they need.
- The Violence Against Women Act of 2005 must build on past efforts and help prevent violence before it begins by targeting resources to children and youth who have been exposed to violence, and engaging men as allies in this work. And we must target many more resources to help some of our marginalized citizens, including immigrant and Native American women, who experience high rates of violence.
- There are solutions to the violence that pervades our society. There is real hope that we can stop domestic and sexual violence. But that will only happen if Congress reauthorizes the Violence Against Women Act and invests more resources into building healthy communities – for our children and their children.

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Sample Email to Your Senators

Note: You can send an email to both of your Senators by going to www.endabuse.org/vawa and clicking on the Contact Congress button on the left. Following is sample text, which should be localized to reflect your community’s concerns.

Last week, Senators Biden, Hatch and Specter introduced the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA), or S. 1197. I urge you to support this bill and do all that you can to ensure its speedy passage.

VAWA was a giant step forward for our nation. Its passage in 1994 and reauthorization in 2000 meant that law enforcement was trained to respond more effectively, and many more victims of violence received services and support. But the law is set to expire this September, and Americans are counting on Congress to reauthorize and strengthen it before than happens.

We need a strong Violence Against Women Act of 2005 that builds on past efforts and helps prevent violence before it begins by targeting resources to children and youth who have been exposed to violence, and engaging men as allies in this work. And we must target more resources to help some of our marginalized citizens, including immigrant and Native American women, who experience high rates of violence. [Add a sentence about what VAWA has meant or will mean in your community, county or state.] I encourage you to support the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. Doing so will make a difference in the lives of so many women and children. Thank you.

[Your name and contact info]

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Sample Letter to the Editor

Note: Please localize this sample letter and submit it to a local daily or weekly newspaper in your community. Most newspapers accept letters that are submitted online. Check your paper to see its submission policies and requirements.

To The Editor:

The Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA) was just introduced in Congress with bipartisan support. Lawmakers have no higher priority than to ensure that this essential bill is reauthorized this year, to help stop domestic and sexual violence.

First passed in 1994, VAWA was a giant step forward. Its passage meant that we acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence cause tremendous harm, and put resources into helping victims. Millions of women, children and families are better off as a result. In 2000, Congress reauthorized VAWA, continuing this work and adding important services for immigrant, rural, disabled and older women.

But there is still work to do. [Add a sentence with local data on domestic and/or sexual violence.]
The *Violence Against Women Act of 2005* must build on past efforts by targeting resources to children and youth who have been exposed to violence, improving our health system’s response to violence, and engaging men as allies in this work. And it must target resources to help some of our marginalized citizens who experience high rates of violence.

Reauthorizing the *Violence Against Women Act* will strengthen families and communities. Lawmakers must act now.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title, Organization, Contact Info]

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**Sample OpEd Piece (Guest Editorial)**

*Note: Most newspapers accept a limited number of guest editorials from local readers. The following is sample text that should be revised and localized to reflect your community’s concerns, and submitted to a local newspaper. The more the piece reflects local concerns, the more likely that a newspaper will run it. If a daily newspaper does not run it, consider submitting it to a weekly newspaper in your town, city or county.*

**The Imperative to Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act**

By [Your Name]

How often do you feel helpless when confronted with the violence that pervades our community? Read about a rape and wonder if our daughters or their daughters will ever be safe? See a report of a young mother who was murdered by her husband or boyfriend, and wonder if there is any way to stop the violence? Hear about the learning and behavioral problems plaguing a child who is growing up in a violent home, and wonder if there is any real way to help?

Not surprisingly, study after study shows that Americans are deeply concerned about violence against women. A February poll commissioned by Lifetime Television found that 77 percent of young women (age 16 to 24) and 64 percent of young men know or have known someone in an abusive relationship. Some six in ten respondents said they know someone who has been sexually assaulted. Eighty-seven percent of young women said they take special precautions to rarely or never walk alone after dark. Nearly two in three (64 percent) said they think about what could happen if they leave a drink unattended.

The next generation is growing up in fear, and exercising grave caution in their day-to-day lives. We can do better. We haven’t yet done nearly enough to stop violence against women. But there are solutions.

One of them is legislative. The *Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA)* was just introduced in Congress, with bipartisan support. Lawmakers have no higher priority than to ensure that this essential bill is reauthorized this year, because it holds great promise for helping to stop domestic and sexual violence.
First passed in 1994, VAWA was a giant step forward for our nation. Its passage meant that we finally acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence cause tremendous harm, and put real resources into helping victims. Millions of women, children and families are better off as a result.

In 2000, Congress reauthorized VAWA, continuing this essential work and adding important services for immigrant, rural, disabled and older women.

VAWA created the National Domestic Violence Hotline, funded training sessions for police, prosecutors and court officials, and established new federal crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking to fill in jurisdictional gaps in prosecuting these crimes. It recognized the authority of Indian nations to respond to violence against Indian women. It provided federal guarantees for Full Faith & Credit (enforcement and recognition of protection orders across state and jurisdictional lines). It enhanced protection for battered immigrants and focused the nation on trafficking of persons.

Here in [your city, town or county], the Violence Against Women Act has [mention programs it has funded, training sessions it has provided, etc.]

Despite all that, there is much more work to do. [Add local data on prevalence, victims needing services, etc.]

We can do better. We need the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 to build on past efforts, to target resources to children and youth who have been exposed to violence, to improve the health care response to violence, and to engage men as allies in this work. We need it create a federal funding stream to support rape crisis centers and other programs that help victims of sexual assault. We need it to put more resources into helping some of our society’s most marginalized citizens, who experience high rates of domestic and sexual violence. We need it to provide innovative ways to provide safe housing, public benefits, legal assistance and safe workplaces for victims of violence.

If Congress reauthorizes the Violence Against Women Act this year, America will continue the work to stop domestic violence, stalking, sexual violence and dating violence. We will invest in the programs that strengthen families and communities. We will keep working toward the day when our homes, streets and communities will be safe.

We ask lawmakers to reauthorize this legislation now, so we can all enjoy a future when neither we – nor our children – have to be afraid.

[Author is title of the organization.]
VAWA continued from page one…

Next Steps

“Congress has no higher priority than to ensure that VAWA is re-authorized,” Soler added, “and that the new bill funds supports for children who have been exposed to violence, public education to teach the next generation that violence is wrong, and programs to improve the health system’s response to violence. We urge every advocate and every person who wants to stop violence to let their Senators know that they want to see VAWA 2005 passed quickly.”

A bipartisan group of House Members will introduce their version of VAWA in coming days.

More information on VAWA, tools for advocates and more is available at www.endabuse.org/vawa and www.vawa2005.org