



News

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Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Signed into Law

Washington, DC – The National Center for Victims of Crime hailed today’s reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, a critically important measure that will continue and strengthen programs that protect women nationwide.

VAWA 2005, as it is called, passed Congress with broad bipartisan support as part of legislation reauthorizing the Department of Justice (HR 3402) and was signed today by President Bush at the White House.

“VAWA reauthorization is vital for our nation’s response to victims,” said Mary Lou Leary, executive director of the National Center. “By enacting such a comprehensive, bipartisan bill, Congress has reaffirmed that victims of crime are a national priority.”

The legislation was shepherded through Congress by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Congressmen Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and John Conyers (D-MI). “These Congressional champions provided extraordinary leadership to ensure that crime victims receive the support they need to rebuild their lives,” said Leary.

First enacted in 1994, VAWA revolutionized the nation’s response to crimes that predominantly affect women, including domestic violence and sexual assault. Under VAWA, crucial services—including emergency shelters, sexual assault nurse examiner programs, child advocacy centers, and hotlines—have become a lifeline for tens of thousands of victims across the country.

The National Center for Victims of Crime played a key role in shaping the Sexual Assault Services Act (SASA), an important addition to VAWA that provides a dedicated funding stream for rape crisis centers and service agencies. “SASA gives long-overdue aid to rape crisis centers,” said Leary, “because constant funding shortages have meant long waiting lists for victim counseling, closed satellite offices, and significantly reduced services. Victims who have endured the trauma of sexual assault deserve to get the help they need immediately—not in three weeks, six months, or even longer. This legislation helps these centers provide crucial services when and where they are needed.”

VAWA 2005 also strengthens the federal interstate stalking law. At the National Center's urging, the legislation makes it a federal crime to stalk someone using high-tech devices, such as global positioning systems.

Other improvements include new programs to expand services to teen and young adult victims, prevent violence, and strengthen the healthcare system's response to violence against women. The legislation will also improve the response to victims with disabilities, seniors, racial or ethnic minorities, those who live in rural communities, and other underserved groups.

For more information on VAWA 2005, visit www.ncvc.org/policy.

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The National Center for Victims of Crime is dedicated to forging a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The National Center's toll-free Helpline, 1-800-FYI-CALL, offers supportive counseling, practical information about crime and victimization, and referrals to local community resources, as well as skilled advocacy in the criminal justice and social service systems.

