

## WHY THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT MATTERS

*BACKGROUND: Originally enacted in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act provided a much needed response to the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence and the significant impact of this violence on women. The Violence Against Women Act offers a comprehensive approach to reducing this violence. Its enactment marked a national commitment – supported by both Republicans and Democrats – to combating domestic violence.*

### **Programs funded by VAWA have dramatically improved the national response to domestic violence.**

The Violence Against Women Act's emphasis on a coordinated community response to domestic violence has resulted in a significant shift in the way communities – including law enforcement, the courts and victim services – address violence against women. The Violence Against Women Act has improved the criminal justice system's ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. Every state has enacted laws making stalking a crime and strengthened criminal rape statutes. And, according to the Justice Department, **the annual incidence of domestic violence has fallen more than 60 percent since 1993.**

Since VAWA was originally enacted, **reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51 percent.** More victims are coming forward and receiving lifesaving services to help them move from crisis to stability. The 2011 National Census of Domestic Violence Services conducted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence found that **67,399 victims were served by domestic violence programs around the country on one day.**

### **Despite the progress since 1994, domestic and sexual violence remain a significant problem.**

While much progress has been made since VAWA became law, studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Justice make clear there is more work to be done. **These studies show that 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States.** Nearly one in five women and one in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime. Sexual assault is one of the most under reported crimes. Nearly 90 percent of victims still do not report the crime to the police. Nearly one in four women and one in seven men report experiencing severe physical violence by an intimate partner, and 45 percent of the women killed in the United States die at the hands of an intimate partner.

**On one day in 2011, domestic violence victims made over 10,000 requests for services, including emergency shelter, housing, transportation, childcare, and legal representation that could not be met** because programs did not have the resources to offer these services.

### **The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act will further this progress and address unmet needs.**

The bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act reflects Congress's ongoing commitment to end domestic and sexual violence. It seeks to expand the law's focus on sexual assault, to **ensure access to services for all victims of domestic and sexual violence**, to reduce domestic violence-related homicides, and to confront the crisis of domestic and sexual violence in tribal communities, among other important steps. It also responds to the current economic reality by consolidating 13 programs, reducing authorization levels by 17 percent, and adding accountability measures to ensure that Federal funds are used efficiently and effectively.

These proposed changes are the result of substantial input from professionals working with the survivors of domestic and sexual violence around the country, including law enforcement officers, victim service providers, judges, and health care professionals. **More than 1,000 national, state and local organizations support the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act.**