

Reauthorize the VAWA

February 14, 2005 (reissued September 15)

ISSUE: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is up for reauthorization and funding. It needs to be reauthorized by Congress every year in order to have its programs implemented by various cabinet agencies. Over the last several years Congress has cut away tens of millions of dollars in vital anti-violence funding.

ACTION: Contact your Senators and Representative to urge that they vote for reauthorization and continued financial support. Urge the President to support VAWA as well.

CALL: The White House Comment line is 202-456-1111. Contact your Senators and Representative through the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.

Or

Write Letter to the President
The Honorable George Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Letter to Senators
The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator (Last name)

Letter to Representative
The Honorable (Full Name)
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name)

You may also wish to go to the Presby Legislative Action Center to send an email message to your officials urging support for VAWA. Go to .

BACKGROUND:

Ninety two percent of homeless women have experienced severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Sixty-three percent have been victims of intimate partner violence as adults. As many as 50% of single homeless women are homeless because of domestic violence. The US Conference of Mayors consistently identifies domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.

Victims of domestic violence often return to their abusers because they cannot find long-term housing. By reducing domestic and sexual violence we can reduce homelessness, and by providing housing solutions for low income families we can reduce domestic and sexual violence.

The proposed Violence Against Women Act includes provisions that use Department Of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS) resources to:

- * Create permanent housing solutions;

- * Expand transitional housing options;
- * Increase the ability of the Section 8 Voucher and Public Housing programs to meet the safety and housing needs of victims;
- * Build collaboration among victim service providers, homeless service providers, housing agencies, housing developers, and organizations specifically responding to underserved communities;
- * Protect the safety and confidentiality of homeless victims receiving services and housing;
- * Ensure that victims have access to the criminal justice system without jeopardizing their current or future housing.
- * Address non-housing needs like helping victims keep their jobs, providing services to children and teens, working with the health care system, providing relief for battered immigrants, creating solutions for disabled victims, and reaching rural communities.

These provisions may impact you and the constituents you serve! Congressional leaders are meeting to plan out the final Fiscal Year 2005 Congressional budget numbers, and VAWA funding is once again being cut. In 2000, Congress authorized \$729 million for VAWA for the year 2005, yet the current House and Senate are wrangling over \$562 million versus \$593 million in funding. This means that whichever budget number prevails, services and programs for victims of violence are being short-changed by over \$130 million that they desperately need. We must demand that they keep their bipartisan promises and campaign pledges to fully fund the Violence Against Women Act.

Violence in the form of sexual abuse, assault, incest and rape is an urgent issue with devastating consequences for women - and men - and their children and families. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000 and funds for its programs and services are administered by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice.

VAWA provides funding for safety programs on campuses and in communities, as well as critical services and programs for survivors of sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence. In the ten years since we won passage, VAWA has funded an effective safety net for millions of women and their children. Through research grants, education, legal assistance, community initiatives, national and local hotlines, assistance for immigrant families, quality medical treatment and evidence gathering, attentive law enforcement, transitional housing, and more, victims of violence have been helped and in many instances have found healing and have escaped the abuse and rebuilt their lives. In order for these programs to be fully effective they need to be fully funded.

General Assembly Policies

Domestic Violence 2001 Statement - PC(USA), pp. 238-274

"Turn Mourning into Dancing"

2. Direct the Presbyterian Washington Office to do the following:

- a. Monitor legislation involving domestic violence and related federal initiatives and advocate the church's policy.
- b. Advocate support for daycare, shelters, social services, etc. that counteract the rise of violence and abuse in society.
- c. Reaffirm the General Assembly's call to urge the United States Senate to ratify the United Nations Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and on the Rights of the Child.
- d. Support policies, programs, and services that protect victims, hold offenders accountable for their offenses, provide incarceration of and treatment for offenders of domestic violence and advocate for support for family members.

3. Direct the Criminal Justice Office in the Social Justice program area to continue to address the injustice of the criminal justice system, including but not limited to racism and sexism, in order to provide effective measures to ensure accountability for crimes involving domestic violence and appropriate rehabilitative treatment for offenders.

4. Direct the Child Advocacy Office to work for the eradication of the sexual and commercial exploitation of children.

5. Direct the Higher Education program area and the National Network of Presbyterian College Women, to make available or develop resources on dating violence and urge college chaplains to address the issue in sermons and in other communications with students.

6. Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to instruct its task forces on disabilities and serious mental illness to include the dimension of domestic violence and its impact in their respective work.

16. Promote legislation that requires hospitals to ask and report instances of domestic violence.