

National Association of Women Lawyers®

American Bar Center
321 North Clark Street, 15th Floor
Chicago, IL 61610

July 6, 2005

The Honorable Joseph Biden
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Biden:

The National Association of Women Lawyers is proud to convey our support for S. 1197, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2005, recently introduced by yourself and Senators Specter, and Hatch. As the Chair of NAWL's Legislative Committee, I am writing to not only inform you about our support for VAWA 2005, but also to offer our help as you continue the fight to save women's lives.

NAWL was founded in 1899, and is the oldest and most respected association for women lawyers in the United States. Our mission includes undertaking efforts to promote the welfare and interest of women lawyers; to promote the welfare and interests of all women; to maintain the honor and integrity of the profession of law; to aid in the enactment of legislation for the common good and, in the administration of such laws, to secure justice for all. Anything we can do to support prompt enactment of VAWA 2005 will also serve our members and promote fulfillment of our mission.

We will be providing information about the continued need for federal support in the fight against domestic violence to our members. You know the alarming statistics on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Here are just a few that we see as illustrative of the need for VAWA 2005:

Nearly one in four women experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood;¹

People ages 16–24 are raped and sexually assaulted at rates higher than any other age group;²

More than one in three American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped in their lifetimes and six of ten will be physically assaulted;³

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The National Institute of Justice, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*, (July 2000).

² Bureau of Justice Statistics, *National Crime Victimization Survey 6* (2002).

³ Patricia Tjaden & Nancy Thoennes, U.S. Department of Justice, "Full Report on the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women," 22 (2000).

Thirty-eight percent of domestic violence victims will become homeless at some point in their lives;⁴ and,

Stalking affects over 1.4 million people a year.⁵

We are particularly heartened that VAWA 2005 continues several important and successful programs, including the STOP (Services and Training for Officers and Prosecutors) grants program, which works to ensure that “victims are safer, better supported by their communities, and treated more uniformly and sensitively by first-response workers.” It also provides for grants to encourage arrest and enforce protection orders, which have helped to increase domestic violence prosecutions. And, in order to ensure that domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking victims have adequate legal representation, VAWA 2005 would improve programs that provide civil legal assistance.

NAWL is also pleased that VAWA 2005 will provide funding for direct service programs for all victims while addressing the unique needs of underserved communities such as disabled, elderly, and racial and ethnic populations, along with those living in rural communities including:

Authorize grants for providing services to victims over age 60;

Improve the response to American Indian and Native Alaskan victims, who experience staggering rates of physical and sexual assault;

Help shelters and other service providers better serve victims with disabilities;

Increase authorization within the Department of Justice to extend grants to state and local governments for services in rural areas;

Provide a desperately needed funding stream to support rape crisis centers and other programs providing direct services to victims of sexual assault;

Authorize grant programs to create and improve services to youth and young adults;

Prevent violence against women and children by reaching out to families at risk;

Train health care workers to recognize and respond to domestic and sexual violence;

Create housing solutions for victims, including allowing victims to access the criminal justice system while maintaining their housing;

⁴ Charlene K. Baker, Cook, Sarah L., Norris, Fran H., “Domestic Violence and Housing Problems: A Contextual Analysis of Women’s Help-seeking, Received Informal Support, and Formal System Response,” *Violence Against Women* 9, no.7 (2003): 754-783.

⁵ Tjaden & Thoennes, “Stalking in America,” National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice, (1998).

Ensure existing forms of immigration relief are available to victims through amendments to current law; and,

Allow victims to keep their jobs by allowing access to unpaid leave for victims.

VAWA was a landmark piece of legislation that helped protect victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. With only a few short weeks remaining until VAWA expires, we offer our support as you seek cosponsor and support for S. 1197 and work to ensure that VAWA is brought before the full Senate for a vote as soon as possible.

If there is anything more we can do to assist in your efforts, don't hesitate to contact me or NAWL member Lorelie Masters who may be reached at Jenner & Block LLP, 601 Thirteenth Street, N.W., Suite 1200 South, Washington, DC 20005-3823, Tel (202) 639-6076, Fax (202) 661-4924, LMasters@jenner.com.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth K. Bransdorfer
Chairperson, NAWL Legislative Committee

900 Monroe Ave, NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616/632-8000

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