

National Domestic Violence Policy

A Summary Federal Legislation Addressing Domestic Violence

For more information about these and other pieces of legislation that may impact survivors of domestic violence, please contact the National Network to End Domestic Violence's Public Policy Department at 202-543-5566 or policy@nnedv.org

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a landmark piece of legislation that sought to improve criminal justice and community-based responses to domestic violence in the United States. VAWA programs range from policies to encourage the prosecution of abusers, to victim's services to prevention programs. VAWA helped forge new alliances between police officers, courts, and victim advocates, changing the landscape for victims who once suffered in silence.

VAWA is reauthorized every five years. Most recently, VAWA was unanimously reauthorized by Congress in 2005.

Each year, Congress appropriates funding for VAWA programs. For Fiscal Year 2008, Congress increased VAWA funding by \$17.3 million! Congress is currently in the Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations process. Advocates are urging Congress to fully fund VAWA at \$683 million.

Family Violence Prevention & Services Act (FVPSA)

The Family Violence Prevention & Services Act serves as the lifeblood of domestic violence programs. This is the single largest funding source providing general operating support for domestic violence crisis lines, shelters, counseling services and victim assistance programs.

FVPSA is reauthorized every five years, most recently reauthorized in 2003 as part of the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act. Congress is working to reauthorize FVPSA before it expires this year.

In Fiscal Year 2008, Congress cut funding to domestic violence programs by \$2.1 million. Advocates are urging Congress to fully fund FVPSA at \$175 million in Fiscal Year 2009.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

The Victims of Crime Act established The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund to provide federal support to state and local programs that assist victims of crime. The VOCA Fund is derived entirely from fines and penalties paid by convicted criminal, not taxpayer revenues.

VOCA is a key source of funding for victim assistance programs such as rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, victim assistants in law enforcement and prosecutors' offices, and other direct services to victims of all types of crime. Approximately 4,400 agencies rely on continued VOCA funding to help 3.8 million victims in the aftermath of crime.

While the VOCA Fund is not paid for by taxpayers, Congress does set a limit to the amount funding available each year so that funds are available for the future or in the event of a national crisis. For example, in Congress released \$68.1 million to support victims of the September 11 terrorism attacks.

The VOCA Fund currently has a balance of \$2 billion; however, President Bush has proposed eliminating the balance. As Congress works on Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations, advocates are urging Congress to protect the VOCA Fund balance and increase the funding cap to \$717 million.

National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act

Introduced by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Arlen Specter (R-PA), the National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act would create a network of pro bono lawyers to assist domestic violence victims in obtaining effective protection orders, filing for separation or divorce, and petitioning for child custody.

The Act is expected to be marked up by the Senate Judiciary Committee the week of May 12, 2008.

International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)

The International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) was introduced in the U.S. Senate on October 31, 2007 by Senator Joseph Biden (D-Delaware) and Senator Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) and in the House of Representatives by Congressman Howard Berman (D-California) on May 1, 2008.

I-VAWA, if passed, would make ending violence against women a diplomatic priority for the United States. It would require the U.S. government to respond to critical outbreaks of gender-based violence in armed conflict—such as the mass rapes now occurring in the Democratic Republic of Congo—within six months. It also would provide critical funding to overseas non-governmental and community-based organizations working to reduce violence.