



The Office of Congressman John Lewis

THE SMART TEEN DATING VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACT (H.R. 3515/ S. 1920)

On November 29, 2011, Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) introduced the Saving Money and Reducing Tragedies through Prevention Act or the SMART Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Act of 2011.

BILL SUMMARY

The SMART Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Act of 2011 improves the coordination and effectiveness of existing Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Specifically, H.R. 3515 and S.1920:

- Consolidate two prevention programs: *Services for Children Exposed to Violence and Abuse* and *Engaging Men and Youth* into one program;
- Streamline these programs into comprehensive initiatives featuring a focus on teen dating violence prevention;
- Create age and developmentally appropriate education programs targeting young people ages 11-19, with a focus on ages 11-14;
- Focus programs on education and mobilization for parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, faith leaders and other “influencers” as role models and educators for young people;
- Establish partnerships with middle schools and high schools, to integrate healthy relationship education and dating violence prevention programming; and
- Connect schools and youth-serving organizations with domestic and sexual violence agencies to ensure services are available if a young person is already being victimized.

BACKGROUND

A few years ago, Congressman Lewis received a disturbing call from Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard about the alarming increase of abuse in Metro Atlanta youth relations. Congressman Lewis responded to the call to action immediately.

He began by reaching out to his congressional colleagues across the aisle in the House and the Senate; together they co-host an annual bipartisan, bicameral congressional briefing to enlighten their colleagues about this disturbing trend. Congressman Lewis also introduces a resolution for Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Month, which passed the House in 2009 and 2010. In previous Congresses, he also introduced the Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Act which established a national initiative to address abusive youth relationships.

Youth dating violence is the pattern of one young person controlling the behaviors of their dating partner. Across the country, this alarming trend has been on the rise. Technology – cell phones and the Internet – can enhance threatening and abusive behaviors in youth dating relationships. The techniques to achieve this control can include physical violence, verbal, mental, and emotional abuse, stalking, and other forms of harassment. Most parents are unaware of teen dating violence and have not had discussions with their children about recognizing the signs of abuse and finding resources to stop it. Like adult domestic violence, teen dating violence crosses all social and economic classes, races, cultures, genders, and sexual orientations.

This legislation is supported by Futures Without Violence, Jewish Women International, Men Can Stop Rape, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Center for Victims of Crime, and the Love is Not Abuse Coalition.