

S. 47, THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2013

The bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA Reauthorization), S. 47, significantly strengthens the ability of the Federal Government, the States, law enforcement, and service providers to combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. As with the previous reauthorizations of VAWA in 2000 and 2005, this bill responds to the realities and needs reported by those who work with victims every day to make VAWA work better for all victims. This bill is nearly identical to S.1925 from the 112th Congress, which passed out of the Senate with broad bipartisan support, but was never taken up in the House.

VAWA-funded programs have dramatically improved the national response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

- VAWA has improved the criminal justice system's ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. As a result of this historic legislation, every state has enacted laws making stalking a crime and strengthened criminal rape statutes. The annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50% since VAWA became law.
- VAWA programs have provided victims with critical services such as transitional housing, legal assistance, and supervised visitation services. They address the unique barriers faced by rural victims, elderly victims, and those with disabilities.
- Since VAWA was originally enacted, reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51%. More victims are coming forward and receiving lifesaving services to help them move from crisis to stability.
- VAWA has successfully encouraged communities to coordinate their responses to violence against women by bringing together victim advocates, law enforcement, the courts, health care professionals, and leaders within faith communities.
- But more work remains. The CDC's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 1 in 4 women has been the victim of severe physical domestic violence and 1 in 5 women has been raped in her lifetime.

VAWA Reauthorization strengthens and streamlines crucial existing programs.

- Renews Successful Programs – This bill reauthorizes important programs – including STOP Grants, Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program, Transitional Housing Assistance Grants, legal assistance for victims, youth prevention programs, and many others – that have helped law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service providers keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Consolidation – VAWA Reauthorization consolidates programs to reduce administrative costs and avoid duplication. It consolidates 13 existing programs, many of which overlap, into four.

- Reduced Authorization – To acknowledge current fiscal realities, this legislation reduces authorizations by 17 percent from the 2005 reauthorization. It reduces or keeps even the authorization for every VAWA program, eliminates or consolidates several, and adds only one small new grant program to support tribes who seek to prosecute domestic violence offenders.
- Accountability – VAWA Reauthorization incorporates new accountability provisions, patterned after those Senator Grassley added to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and other bills, but tailored to fit VAWA programs. They include strict new audit requirements, enforcement mechanisms for grantees that fail to fix problems found in the audits, restrictions on grantees’ executive compensation and investments and their administrative costs – all aimed to ensure that VAWA funds are used wisely and efficiently.

VAWA Reauthorization builds on existing efforts to more effectively combat violence against all victims.

- Focus on Sexual Assault – Recognizing the continuing crisis of inadequate reporting, enforcement, and services for victims of sexual assault, VAWA Reauthorization includes measures to ensure an increased focus on sexual assault prevention, enforcement, and services, including:
 - New purpose areas in key programs to improve law enforcement and forensic responses to sexual assault and to address backlogs of untested rape kits; and
 - A requirement that 20% of STOP State formula grant program funds and 25% of funds in the Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program be allocated for sexual assault-related programs.
- Homicide Reduction – The bill provides tools and encourages best practices, which have been proven to be effective, to prevent domestic violence homicides by training law enforcement, victim service providers, and court personnel to identify and connect high-risk victims to crisis intervention services.
- Violence Against Native Women – Combating violence against Native women has been a core principle of VAWA since its inception. VAWA Reauthorization strengthens existing programs to address the ongoing crisis of violence against women in tribal communities, who face rates of domestic violence and sexual assault much higher than those faced by the general population. The legislation narrowly expands concurrent tribal criminal jurisdiction over those who assault Indian spouses and dating partners in Indian country, clarifies jurisdiction for civil protection orders, and strengthens Federal assault statutes.
- Expanded Protection for Immigrant Victims – This bill continues follows the example of each previous VAWA reauthorization in including increased protections for vulnerable immigrant victims of domestic and sexual violence. It ensures protection for the children of victims and strengthens protections for women brought into the country by marriage brokers, among other important improvements.
- Housing Protections – The bill ensures that housing protections reach a broader group of victims by applying existing housing protections to nine additional federal housing programs.

These protections are designed to ensure that victims do not lose housing benefits as a result of their victimization.

- Expanded Services for Underserved Communities –VAWA Reauthorization attempts to ensure that VAWA programs reach more communities whose members need services. It expands the definition of “underserved” to include religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity to encourage development of services for people who have had trouble getting help in the past based on those categories. It also includes new purpose areas to ensure that grant funds can be used to make services available for all victims regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Civil Rights Protection – The bill includes a civil rights provision which guarantees consistent application of civil rights protections to all VAWA programs, in place of the patchwork of inconsistent civil rights protections currently in place, and ensures that no victim can be denied services based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.
- Rape Kit Backlog Reduction – VAWA 2013 incorporates the SAFER Act, which was introduced by Senator Cornyn in the 112th Congress. This consensus version of the SAFER Act helps states and local governments to conduct audits of rape kits in their possession and also provides assistance to law enforcement to take key steps to reduce backlogs of rape kits under their control. This bill passed the Senate at the end of 2012 by unanimous consent.

VAWA Reauthorization has widespread, bipartisan support.

- More than 1300 local, state, and national organizations support this bill.
- In the 112th Congress, the Senate bill had 61 cosponsors, including 8 Republicans. It passed out of the Senate in April 2012 with an impressive 68-31 votes, but was never taken up in the House.
- This year’s legislation has 61 cosponsors, including 7 Republicans.

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For more information, please contact Clark Flynt at clark_flynt@judiciary-dem.senate.gov or 202-224-7703.