



Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Key Recommendations from Advocates for Reauthorization

April 2018

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence ("NTF") is focused on the development, passage and implementation of effective public policy to address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. The full membership of the NTF is comprised of a large and diverse group of national, tribal, state, territorial and local organizations, as well as individuals, committed to securing an end to violence against women.

The NTF is supporting a limited number of key enhancements to the Violence Against Women Act based on our process of broadly surveying thousands for advocates and allied professionals about the needs of survivors and communities. This extensive feedback from the field informed the work of subject matter workgroups that developed specific recommendations to improve VAWA in critical areas.

DEFINITIONS:

Revise a few definitions to clarify language, match state laws, address new technological concerns, and provide technical corrections.

- New definitions include: Abuse in Later Life (in lieu of elder abuse); Alternative Justice Response; Digital Services; Forced Marriage; Economic Abuse; and Technological Abuse.
- Amended definitions include:
 - Domestic Violence – the original definition is outdated and does not sync with most state laws; correct unintended 2013 deletion of "Court-based and court-related personnel."
 - Legal Services (to include vacatur and expungement).
- Sunsetting definitions include Child Maltreatment (no longer used in VAWA) and Elder Abuse (replaced by Abuse in Later Life).

NEW GRANT CONDITIONS:

- Allow grantees to use technology to protect victim privacy.
- Extend advocate confidentiality beyond the death of the victim so victims feel free to communicate fully with their advocates without concern for reputation, civil liability, or possible harm to friends or family.

AMENDED GRANT CONDITIONS:

- Clarify that VAWA confidentiality applies to federal and state agencies seeking information from grantees.
- Urge DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to make training widely available.
- Permit grantees to serve victims of forced marriage who are also victims of a VAWA crime.
- Increase the cap on expenditures requiring Deputy Attorney General approval to allow DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women to more easily provide oversight and support for VAWA multi-day training events.

INVEST IN PREVENTION:

- Increase the authorization of the Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE) to \$150 million (current authorization \$50 million) and specifically include sexual harassment to its authorized use. Demand for programs funded by RPE have skyrocketed with the #MeToo movement and the national focus on campus sexual assault, and a corresponding increase is critically necessary to meet the need of communities.
- Increase funding for VAWA Consolidated Youth grants. Prevention education that engages men and boys as allies and promotes healthy relationships is key to reducing gender-based violence. Increased funding will provide programs with the resources they need to increase the depth and reach of these critical programs.

EXPAND ACCESS:

- Train healthcare providers to better recognize and respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking across the lifespan, particularly through HRSA programs such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program.
- Expressly add sexual harassment to the allowable uses of the Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center, which provides tools, resources, and training to private employers and federal agencies.
- Promote economic security for survivors and assist with supports for leaving abusers with targeted enhancements to existing law including allowing domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking victims to be eligible for unemployment insurance; protections from discrimination in employment based on one's status as a victim; research into the economic impacts of victimization on college students, and public education related to economic abuse and economic security for victims.
- Promote safety for victims of violence on tribal lands by: clarifying that tribal courts can hold domestic violence offenders who assault tribal police officers or other justice officials accountable; ensuring non-Indian perpetrators who commit sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, and trafficking on tribal lands are held accountable; creating a permanent authorization for DOJ's Tribal Access to National Crime Information Program; improving the response to cases of missing and murdered women in tribal communities; and addressing the unique barriers to safety for Alaska Native women.

REMOVE BARRIERS:

- Ensure compliance with VAWA non-discrimination requirements and guarantee equal access to VAWA protections for all victims regardless of gender, especially those from marginalized communities.
- Enforce housing rights for survivors/victims, create a position at HUD specifically tasked with this work, increase survivors' options to maintain housing or break their leases, and strengthen the emergency transfer protections in federal housing programs to assist survivors needing to flee their homes due to safety concerns.
- Add a new purpose to the Improving Criminal Justice Response grant program to implement alternative justice responses that are focused on victim autonomy, agency and safety to provide resolution and restitution for the victim.
- Strengthen privacy protections across state line, online with digital records, and preserve confidentiality upon survivor's death in accordance with their wishes.
- Remove the use of bench warrants and other body attachments to compel victim cooperation and testimony, as this has been found to be traumatizing for the victim and counterproductive in encouraging victims to cooperate.
- Acknowledge the trauma of incarceration on women and their family members, especially their children, and improve health care services and trauma informed responses to better prepare incarcerated women to return to their communities.
- Improve enforcement of current domestic violence-related firearms laws and equally protect all victims.

For more information about the NTF and our positions, please visit our website at www.4vawa.org.