

Dear Member of Congress:

Bipartisan groups of senators and representatives have come together to introduce legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. As people of faith, we are writing to urge you to support VAWA 2005 and help continue the fight to end domestic and sexual violence. With its programs set to expire September 30th, Congress must act now to reauthorize and strengthen VAWA.

Tragically, violence against women remains the worst public health crisis facing women in the US. Approximately 2.3 million women each year are raped or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse or romantic partner. Every year, over 1200 women are murdered by a current or former intimate partner. One-third of teenagers report experiencing some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships, and 44% of all rape victims are younger than 18. Anywhere from 3.3 to 10 million children witness domestic violence each year, and exposure to domestic violence is the strongest risk factor for passing violence onto the next generation.

In our houses of worship, in our communities, and through the variety of social services we provide, we have seen the devastating impact this violence has on individuals and on families. Moreover, all of our faiths share a strong belief in the dignity and moral value of every person that challenges us to speak out against anything that violates this innate dignity and to promote healing and restoration. We have responded by making our houses of worship safe places where victims of violence can come for help, by offering counseling and support to victims, by establishing and supporting shelters for those who have been abused, and by educating our congregations and communities about domestic and sexual violence. Unfortunately, we are also aware that religious teachings have sometimes been misused to justify family violence and oppression. We strongly reject such misuse and believe that true family values are grounded in mutual respect and love that precludes violence in any form.

Our values are expressed in these teachings:

Baha'i: *"The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly."* -Baha'i Writings

Christian: *"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. (1 Corinthians 13:4-6) "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)*

Humanist: *"Values serve human beings, and human beings are best served when all are treated equally with compassion, kindness, and dignity. Therefore every individual must be free from abuse and violence".*

Jewish: *"If I am not for me, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"* -Rabbi Hillel, from the Pirke Avot

Muslim: *"O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness...on the contrary, live with them on a footing of kindness and equality..." (Qur'an 4:19) "And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect." (Qur'an 30:21).*

We speak together now in support of the Violence Against Women Act because it has been a critical tool in bringing domestic and sexual violence out of the shadows, educating and engaging communities to improve institutional responses to this violence, and helping victims rebuild their lives. Programs such as

the National Domestic Violence Hotline, battered women's shelters, and training grants for police, prosecutors and court officials have all contributed to the decline in domestic violence since VAWA was first enacted in 1994. However, as VAWA has increased awareness and engaged new partners in the effort to end domestic and sexual violence, new areas of need have been identified.

VAWA 2005 responds to these needs by strengthening current programs and creating new ones that further integrate community responses and resources for a more comprehensive approach to ending the cycle of violence. VAWA reauthorization will continue essential programs; dedicate a new funding stream for services for victims of sexual assault; help children and youth who experience or witness violence and target more resources to prevention; address the needs of victims from communities of color, seniors, people with disabilities and other underserved communities; improve services and protections for immigrant and tribal victims; and support health, housing and economic security programs designed to stop violence and help victims. Strong, bipartisan reauthorization bills have been introduced in both the House (H.R. 2876) and Senate (S. 1197) that give Congress a unique opportunity to further the safety and stability of the lives of survivors of domestic violence.

As people of faith, we believe there is a fundamental moral obligation to protect the lives and dignity of women and children by supporting efforts to end the cycle of violence. The Violence Against Women Act is a vital tool in this process. With barely two months remaining until VAWA expires, we urge you to co-sponsor S. 1197 and ensure that the legislation is brought to the floor for a vote as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

American Humanist Association
The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute
Catholic Charities USA
Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Equal Partners in Faith
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FaithTrust Institute
General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
The Interfaith Alliance
Jewish Council on Public Affairs
Jewish Women International
Lutheran Services in America
NA'AMAT USA
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Coalition of American Nuns
National Council of Jewish Women
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States
NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
The Peaceful Families Project
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

(as of 8/1/05)