

**U.S. Senate VAWA Briefing: The Need to Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act**  
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**226 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

*Cindy Dyer, Vice President of Human Rights, Vital Voices Global Partnership; and former Director, Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice*

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and share with you some of my observations about the critical impact of VAWA from the perspective of a grantee, a prosecutor, a former Director of Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women, and now an international human rights advocate.

I was already a prosecutor in Dallas when VAWA passed in 1994, and I remained a specialized domestic and sexual violence prosecutor for the next 13 years. During that time, in addition to prosecuting all levels of domestic and sexual violence cases from misdemeanors up to capital murders, I also applied for and received money from OVW in the form of STOP grants and a discretionary grant under the Grants to Encourage Arrest Program. From 1994-2007, I had a front row seat to the drastic improvements that the Violence Against Women Act made in the lives of domestic and sexual violence survivors in Dallas, Texas.

Because I had personally witnessed the benefits of VAWA, I was particularly excited and honored when President George W. Bush appointed me to be the Director of OVW in 2007. While working at OVW, I saw the hard work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure that grant money is spent in the most cost effective and impactful way possible.

For the past nine years, I have been the Vice President of Human Rights at Vital Voices Global Partnership, a non-partisan organization that partners with and empowers women leaders around the globe who want to improve and transform their communities and countries. Over the last 20 years, Vital Voices has worked with over 15 thousand women in more than 144 countries and territories. In this position, I work with women leaders all over the world to replicate the successes that the U.S. has achieved in preventing and responding to violence against women through VAWA. It is an honor to share with you some of the attributes that I believe make VAWA unique and successful.

First, providing both discretionary grants and formula grants has allowed VAWA to achieve two different types of successful outcomes. Discretionary grants give OVW an opportunity to encourage communities to adopt unique approaches to entrenched problems. These programs often address an overlooked area (such as abuse of the the elderly or persons with disabilities) or allow us to encourage a new and innovative solution, such as Family Justice Centers or Transitional Housing. On the other hand, STOP and formula grants ensure that grant money is evenly spread into the cracks and crevices of our communities to ensure that services are available and accessible to all victims no matter where they live.

Second, VAWA's thoughtful, structured funding allocations recognize that no one sector working alone can prevent and respond to the epidemic of violence against women. Victims and survivors require a holistic response that addresses their comprehensive needs. Great police reports mean nothing without a willing and trained prosecutor to pursue the case in court. Successful prosecutions mean nothing if the victim and her children end up homeless and impoverished. And the violence will never permanently end unless victims are able to obtain protective orders and a divorce. Acknowledging that all of these sectors – law enforcement, prosecution, victim services, etc. –are crucial, VAWA requires that some money be spent in each of these essential response categories. This prevents all of the money from going to only

one critical service and ensures that no one string in the safety net for battered women is weak. If one string is weak, the victims will fall through.

A third brilliant aspect of VAWA is the requirement that all grantees are required to set aside a certain amount of their grant money for training and technical assistance. VAWA has done an excellent job of setting standards and rules for grantees to follow. Grantees must refrain from engaging in practices which harm victims, such as dual arrests and charging victims for the cost of receiving a rape exam. However, not every practice or decision can be regulated. The required training and technical assistance, which must be provided by approved organizations, ensures that grantees have the foundational knowledge and skills when they need to rely on their discretion and judgement. Additionally, providing financial grants management training to grantees is not only fiscally responsible, but also is in the best interest of victims. The very people who we want to receive this money – those who are providing shelter to victims in rural areas, those who are arresting the bad guys on the streets of our communities - are almost by definition not trained and experienced in the details of federal accounting procedures. OVW has tackled this problem by providing assistance to them in managing these complex grants.

Fourth, one of my favorite aspects of VAWA is the focus on prevention and early intervention. In so many of the countries in which I work, the legislative focus is on prosecuting murder cases, passing femicide laws, or responding to cases of extreme violence. While good legislation needs to address these egregious crimes, great legislation allows us to prevent these types of cases, and that is what VAWA does. By encouraging the availability of free protective orders and the prosecution of low level assaults, addressing domestic violence the *first* time it occurs, VAWA allows communities to address violence before it escalates.

Lastly, VAWA has been so successful because of the requirement that grantees work with other sectors as part of a coordinated community response. This requirement has established and fostered relationships between government agencies, service providers, police, prosecutors, and advocates all over the country. These connections and coalitions have permanently changed and improved how communities prevent and respond to VAW. Most importantly, these relationships last long after the grant money has ended. I believe this fundamental and sustainable change in the way the different sectors working to end domestic and sexual violence now work more cohesively is the greatest measure of success for a piece of legislation.

Thank you so much for allowing me to share these comments with you. At Vital Voices, I work with women leaders around the world who are tackling violence against women, so I recognize more than anyone how important it is to also have male leaders who stand with and support them. The U.S. is so fortunate to have the women and men in this room working collaboratively, across party lines to create a safer world for women and girls. Please know that I recognize and appreciate your efforts.