

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Hearing on “VAWA Next Steps: Protecting Women From Gun Violence”  
July 30, 2014**

Today the Senate Judiciary Committee returns to a question that we started this Congress with: What can we do to further reduce the scourge of violence against women in this country? I was proud that the President signed into law the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in June of last year. That law took important new steps to support all victims of domestic and sexual violence, regardless of their immigration status, their sexual orientation, or their membership in an Indian tribe. After only a year, the law has already made our communities safer. It has improved protections for women, whether in their home, on a college campus, or at their job.

But we know that ending violence against women is not an easy problem to solve, and there is, of course, more to do. Last May I discussed the disturbing relationship between domestic violence and gun violence with former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords – a powerful advocate for common sense reforms. I was happy to accommodate her request for the Judiciary Committee to hold this important hearing. Violence against women comes in all forms, and there is a clear and deadly connection between domestic violence and gun violence.

In my home state of Vermont – a peaceful state that enjoys a very low crime rate overall - we are tragically all too aware of that connection. In Vermont, a majority of all homicides involve intimate partner or family violence. This amounts to one of the highest intimate partner homicide rates in the country. And according to FBI data from 2000-2012, 56 percent of women shot to death in Vermont were killed by intimate partners. Of those women, 50 percent were shot to death by dating partners. This is simply unacceptable.

Today we will hear from those who are working hard to reduce this devastating violence and I look forward to hearing their testimony on what we can do. We know that some common sense steps can make it more difficult for abusers to access guns and those steps can save lives.

Today, convicted domestic abusers can too easily skirt criminal background checks to illegally purchase firearms. For example, they can obtain firearms through intermediaries known as straw purchasers. Other abusers are able to lawfully purchase firearms because they were convicted of stalking or crimes involving dating violence, which are not covered by existing law. Abusers exploit these loopholes, too often with deadly results.

For decades I have worked side by side with survivors of domestic and sexual violence and the professionals who support them every day. I have heard many heartbreaking stories of the horrors of domestic violence – most recently on Monday while I visited the Women Helping Battered Women facility in Burlington, Vermont. The bravery and sheer resiliency of survivors is inspiring. They are among the most courageous people I have ever met.

It is long past time for the Senate to muster its own courage. Last year I challenged my fellow Senators to come forward, to work together and build consensus around solutions to gun

violence. Some did. I hope that those who did not will listen today. Protecting women from gun violence should not be a partisan issue. We should all agree that keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers will save lives, and for that reason alone it is worth pursuing.

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