

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
July 13, 2011

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)
Chairman, Senate Committee On The Judiciary,
"The Violence Against Women Act: Building On Seventeen Years Of Accomplishments"
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Today this Committee considers once again the importance of the Violence Against Women Act, which since 1994 has been the centerpiece of the Federal Government's commitment to combating domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes against women.

We worked in a bipartisan way to pass the Violence Against Women Act and its two subsequent reauthorizations. This law filled a void that had left too many victims of domestic and sexual violence without a way to ensure safety and justice, and without the help they needed. I was proud to work with then-Senator Biden and Senator Hatch to achieve this progress, and I look forward to building on its legacy.

I saw the devastating effects of domestic and sexual violence early in my career as the Vermont State's Attorney for Chittenden County. Violence and abuse reach the homes of people from all walks of life and all parts of the country every day, regardless of gender, race, culture, age, class, or sexuality.

The Violence Against Women Act has helped to transform our criminal justice system, improving the response to the complex issues of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. It has provided legal remedies, social support, and coordinated community responses. With time, it has evolved to better address the needs of underserved populations and to include critical new programs focusing on prevention. Since the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act, the rate of domestic violence has declined, more victims have felt confident to come forward to report these crimes and to seek help, and states have come forward to enact complimentary laws to combat these crimes.

Despite this progress, however, our country still has a long way to go. Millions of women, men, children, and families continue to be traumatized by abuse. We know that 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by a partner each year. One in six women and one in 33 men are victims of sexual assault. One in 12 women and one in 45 men have been stalked in their lifetime.

As we look toward reauthorization of VAWA, we must continue to ensure that the law evolves to fill unmet needs. We must increase access to support services, especially in rural communities and among older Americans. We must prioritize our response to the high rates of violence experienced by Native American and immigrant women.

Programs to assist victims of domestic and sexual violence, and to prevent these crimes, are particularly important during difficult economic times. The economic pressures of a lost job, home, or car can add stress to an already abusive relationship. The loss of these resources can make it harder for victims to escape a violent situation. And as victims' needs are growing, state

budget cuts are resulting in fewer available services, including fewer emergency shelters, less transitional housing, less counseling, and less childcare. A 2010 survey by the National Network to End Domestic Violence found that in just one day, more than 70,600 adults and children were served by local domestic violence programs. At the same time more than 9,500 requests for services went unmet due to a lack of resources.

These numbers illustrate the importance of maintaining and strengthening the Violence Against Women Act. Its programs are more vital than ever, including the STOP Formula Grant program, which provides resources to law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, the courts, and victim advocacy groups to improve victim safety and to hold offenders accountable for their crimes against women. The Transitional Housing Assistance Grants program is also essential to provide safe havens to victims fleeing from domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. In the midst of a mortgage and housing crisis, transitional housing is especially important because long-term housing options are becoming increasingly scarce.

Today we welcome a distinguished panel of witnesses from around the country who can share important perspectives and personal experience. I want to welcome Jane Van Buren, who is well known in Vermont for her work helping women to escape domestic violence through the organization Women Helping Battered Women. She brings particular insight into the importance of transitional housing to those seeking to escape abuse and violence. I look forward to the contributions of all of today's witnesses.

The Violence Against Women Act and its reauthorizations have always been passed on a strong, bipartisan basis. We have come together based on our shared conviction that domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence are wrong and we should join together to help combat them. We have agreed across party lines that we must work together to confront these problems and help victims move on with their lives. I hope we can come together once again to reauthorize this vital legislation.

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