



September 13, 2018

Re: Support for the 2018 Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 6545) and opposition to a short-term extension

Dear member of Congress:

On behalf of the Ohio Women's Public Policy Network, I am writing to express our support for the 2018 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 6545) as introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX). We strongly urge you to sign on as a co-sponsor of this critically important legislation and reject any attempts to pass a short-term extension of the VAWA in the continued resolution.

As a coalition, we bring together more than 30 key partners to collaboratively advance policies that create economic security for women and strengthen families. We advocate for policies that promote the opportunity for women to be economically secure, safe, and healthy. **The reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act is fundamental to that mission.**

Gender-based violence – which includes domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking – continues to be a pervasive and prevalent issue throughout the United States. It impacts women and girls across all races, ages, classes, and ethnic backgrounds, but women of color and women in other marginalized communities face disproportionately higher rates and impacts. This violence has far-reaching implications beyond the physical health and safety of women and girls, directly affecting economic security and workforce involvement: disrupting productivity, jeopardizing the safety of victims and co-workers, and increasing absenteeism and employee turnover. Research estimates that the average lifetime cost of intimate partner violence for women is \$103,767.¹

When the first iteration of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was enacted in 1994, it made groundbreaking strides forward in the efforts to confront, prevent, and end violence against women. Since that time, Congress has built upon and improved the initial legislation with reauthorization bills passed in 2000, 2005, and 2013 with bipartisan support; responding to the emerging and shifting needs of survivors and advocates.

Now, the VAWA is set to expire on September 30, 2018 – threatening the health, safety, and economic stability of survivors and victims. With the impending deadline, Congress must reject attempts to pass a short-term extension of the VAWA, and instead, act on the 2018 reauthorization bill, which makes modest yet significant improvements to current law. We need a real bill that

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018, April). Lifetime Economic Burden of Intimate Partner Violence Among U.S. Adults. [Online]. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(18\)31904-4/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(18)31904-4/fulltext).

supports survivors, and a short-term ‘fix’ that impedes progress on a full reauthorization bill is not an effective solution.

As the expiration deadline approaches, the fate of crucial funding, protections, and programs for survivors and victims hangs in the balance. Congress must reaffirm their commitment to provide protections to survivors and victims; improve community-based programs to combat and prevent gender-based violence, and modernize tools and resources to prevent – and ultimately end – gender-based violence. To do that, we are calling upon members of the House of Representatives to sign on as a co-sponsor of the 2018 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act and reject attempts to pass a short-term extension of the VAWA. **Enacting modest yet substantial changes to the VAWA, the 2018 reauthorization bill (H.R. 6545) would:**

- **Allocate important investments in preventative programs:** The bill would increase funding to the Rape Prevention & Education Program from \$50 million to \$150 million, responding to the increased need and demand for such services.
- **Return sovereignty to tribes to prosecute non-native offenders of sexual assault, trafficking, stalking, and child abuse.** Reports estimate that Native Americans are victims of violence crimes at twice the rate of any other demographic group in the United States, and Native women experience exceptionally higher rates of violence.² These rates of violence are compounded by complications for legally prosecuting non-native perpetrators. The protections extended in H.R. 6545 would hold offenders accountable on tribal lands.
- **Bolster protections for survivors living in public housing, including those seeking housing transfers based on safety concerns:** Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent causes of homelessness for women because they often have limited resources after fleeing an abusive relationship or experience eviction linked to abuse (due to police involvement which landlords view negatively). According to research, approximately half (50 percent) of women who are homeless report that the immediate cause of their homelessness was intimate partner violence. The strengthened protections in the 2018 reauthorization of the VAWA are particularly important to survivors facing housing instability who are supporting children. Approximately 92 percent of homeless mothers reported experiencing physical or sexual assault during their lifetime.³
- **Modernize and update definitions of certain types of violence:** The 2018 reauthorization would add new definitions that respond to the experiences of survivors and feedback from advocates executing the work on the ground. The new definitions include: Abuse in Later Life, Alternative Justice Response, Digital Services, Forced Marriage, Economic Abuse, and Technological Abuse. It would also update the current definition of domestic violence.
- **Improve tools and regulations for judicial and law enforcement to more effectively ensure that crimes are investigated and prosecuted, prioritizing victims’ wishes in the final outcome:** The VAWA has led to improved responses from and interactions with the criminal justice system for survivors of gender-based violence, which has contributed to increased reporting by survivors. The 2018 reauthorization would implement two specific improvements for the criminal justice system: (1) Add a new purpose to the Improving Criminal Justice Response

² Women of Color Network. (2006, June). *Facts & Stats: Domestic Violence in Communities of Color*.

https://www.doj.state.or.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/women_of_color_network_facts_domestic_violence_2006.pdf

³ Olsen, L., Rollins, C., Billhardt, K. The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2013, June). *The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homeless*. http://www.ncdsv.org/images/WSCADV-VAHFP_Intersection-of-DV-and-Homelessness_6-2013.pdf

grant program to implement alternative justice responses that are focused on victim autonomy, agency and safety to provide resolution and restitution for the victim and (2) Strengthen privacy protections across state lines and online with digital records, and preserve confidentiality upon a survivor's death in accordance with their wishes.

- **Improve enforcement of current federal domestic violence-related firearms laws and close loopholes to reduce firearm-involved abuse and intimate partner homicide.** There is a direct link between domestic violence and gun violence, and women are five times more likely to be killed by intimate partner abuse when a gun is present. Black women are disproportionately impacted by gun violence, and in 2015, studies found that Black women were two and a half times more likely to be murdered by men than were White women.⁴
- **Expand and improve protections for incarcerated survivors:** Women have become the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population, and more than 60 percent of women in state prisons have at least one child under the age of 18.⁵ The 2018 reauthorization bill recognizes the stress, trauma, and financial toll incarcerated women and their families face, particularly children. To better prepare incarcerated women returning to their communities, H.R. 6545 would improve health care services to focus on trauma informed responses.
- **Expand the VAWA's ability to respond to sexual harassment, which impacts women in every industry and sector of work:** Women of color and immigrant women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault in the workplace as they are overrepresented in lower-wage industries, which have stark power imbalances and meager legal protections.

The Violence Against Women Act has been fundamental in preventing and responding to gender-based violence in key ways: addressing barriers to accessing safety and resources that survivors face, such as child care, transportation, and affordable housing; focusing resources and outreach to marginalized communities, which often face higher rates of gender-based violence; and improving interactions and responses with the criminal justice and court system for survivors.

It is imperative that Congress continue to extend and improve upon these protections and programs for survivors and victims provided by the VAWA – the future of Ohio women, families, and communities depends on it. **Again, we strongly urge you to co-sponsor the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2018 (H.R. 6545) and reject a short-term extension of the VAWA in the continuing resolution.**

Sincerely,



Erin Ryan
Managing Director, The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network

The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network is a coalition unlike any other group in the state. Formed in 2015 and convened by Innovation Ohio Education Fund, we bring together more than 30 organizations to

⁴ Green, S. The Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2017, July). One Pager: Violence Against Black Women – Many Types, Far-reaching Effects. <https://iwpr.org/violence-black-women-many-types-far-reaching-effects/>

⁵ The Sentencing Project. (2015, November). Fact Sheet: Incarcerated Women and Girls. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Incarcerated-Women-and-Girls.pdf>

collaboratively advance policies that create economic security for women and strengthen Ohio families. Using a collective voice that represents the women of our state, the network works to ensure that public policy reflects the true needs of women and families.

Members of the Women’s Public Policy Network include the following organizations:

ACLU of Ohio	Ohio National Organization for Women
ACTION OHIO	Ohio Progressive Asian Women’s Leadership
American Association of University Women, Ohio	Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Catholics for Choice	Ohio Urban Resources Systems (O.U.R.S.)
Children’s Defense Fund – Ohio	Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
Closing the Women’s Wealth Gap	Policy Matters Ohio
Hadassah Columbus	ProgressOhio Education Fund
Innovation Ohio Education Fund	Restoring Our Own Through Transformation (ROOTT)
Jobs with Justice, Cleveland Chapter	The Women's Fund of Central Ohio
NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio	The Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation
National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Central Ohio Chapter	UHCAN Ohio
National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Chapter	URGE
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence	YWCA Columbus
Ohio Domestic Violence Network	YWCA Dayton
Ohio Federation of Teachers	YWCA Greater Cincinnati