

THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN REAUTHORIZATION ACT: *RESPONDING TO CHANGING NEEDS IN THE FIELD*

The Violence Against Women Act was enacted in 1994, and has twice been reauthorized by Congress, each time with unanimous Senate support. With each authorization, the Act has evolved to address the changing needs of victims.

Reauthorizations in 2000 and 2005 expanded the scope of VAWA to reach more victims.

When Congress seeks to reauthorize legislation, it closely examines the effectiveness and reach of grant programs. In reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act in 2000 and 2005, Congress expanded the reach of VAWA to provide its lifesaving assistance to more victims.

The 2000 reauthorization of VAWA:

- **Created the U Visa** for immigrant victims to help assist law enforcement prosecute violent crimes
- **Expanded the definition of underserved** to include alienage status and age
- Created the **Elder Abuse grant program** to respond to needs of older victims
- Created the **Disabilities grant program** to better meet the needs of disabled individuals
- **Granted Tribal courts full civil jurisdiction** to enforce protection orders
- Created the **Civil Legal Assistance grant program**
- Created the **Transitional Housing grant program**
- Created **Safe Havens for Children grant program** to provide supervised, safe visitation of children for families experiencing domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault
- **Established national standards for training** sexual assault forensic examiners

The 2005 reauthorization of VAWA:

- Created the **Culturally and Linguistically Specific grant program**
- Created the **Services to Advocate and Respond to Youth grant program** for teen and youth victims of domestic and sexual violence
- Directed **increased funding to tribal programs** serving Native and Alaska Native women
- Created the **Combat Violence Against Women in Public Housing grant program**
- Created the **Long-Term Housing grant program** to support efforts to develop long-term housing options for victims of domestic and sexual violence.
- Created the **Training and Education of Health Professionals in Domestic and Sexual Violence grant program**

The changes proposed in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act are modest.

In contrast to prior reauthorizations, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act is modest. The legislation reduces authorizations by more than 17 percent and consolidates 13 existing programs into four to reduce duplication and streamline application and administrative processes. It contains only one new grant program – a five million dollar pilot program for tribal jurisdictions seeking to prosecute domestic violence offenders.

Among the bill's critical changes are improvements to existing law to ensure that services are available for all victims, regardless of religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity and that the needs of tribal communities, battered immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities are effectively addressed. **These changes were adopted as a result of significant input from victims and the professionals who work with them every day.** More than 1,000 national, state and local organizations have expressed their support for this bill.