

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the  
House of Representatives  
H-232 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Saving the lives of victims of domestic violence should be above politics. Yet politics seem to have gotten in the way of House passage of the bipartisan Senate Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act, a bill to strengthen law enforcement's response to domestic violence that cleared the Senate on April 26<sup>th</sup> with a strong bipartisan vote. In the time since the Senate passed its bill, over 1.5 million Americans have become victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner. We cannot afford to let another day go by. We urge you to swiftly allow for an up-or-down vote in the House on the Senate's bipartisan VAWA Reauthorization Act.

Since being enacted in 1994, VAWA has developed a long track record of protecting women and reducing the incidence of domestic violence by providing critical support to law enforcement and services for victims. Each previous reauthorization substantially improved the way VAWA addressed the changing needs of domestic violence victims by addressing challenges facing older victims, victims with disabilities, and other underserved groups. The Senate's bipartisan VAWA Reauthorization Act continues this tradition by placing greater emphasis on training for law enforcement and forensic response to sexual assault, and by strengthening protections for all victims regardless of where they live, their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. These changes were included at the recommendation of professionals from all over the country who work with victims every day.

We should not let politics pick and choose which victims of abuse to help and which to ignore. However, this fundamental principle is not reflected in the House version of VAWA reauthorization legislation, which disregarded the input from professionals and would eliminate Senate language that ensures universal protection for LGBT victims who currently face obstacles to accessing VAWA's life-saving services, make it more difficult for local law enforcement to help immigrant victims of domestic violence, and fails to match the Senate's effort to address the epidemic of domestic violence on tribal lands.

Although significant progress has been made, domestic violence and sexual assault remain serious challenges. Every day, abusive partners kill three women, and for every victim killed there are nine more who narrowly escape. It would be unacceptable to step away from our commitment to stopping violence and abuse, and from seeking justice for victims, by undermining VAWA's protections.

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The delay of the VAWA Reauthorization Act has real consequences for these and future victims, and should not be allowed to continue. VAWA was enacted and reauthorized with broad bipartisan support, and this year's reauthorization is endorsed by over 500 state and local organizations, and 47 attorneys general. We are concerned that unnecessary political and procedural posturing is breaking the bipartisan consensus on an issue that should rise above such considerations, and is creating an unconscionable delay that further threatens victims of violence. We urge you to honor VAWA's bipartisan history and affirm the House's commitment to combating domestic violence by having an up or down vote on the Senate's VAWA Reauthorization Act.

Sincerely,

  
PATRICK LEAHY  
United States Senator

  
LISA MURKOWSKI  
United States Senator