

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 26, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We hope you will quickly bring S. 47, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, up for a vote in the House. For almost 18 years, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has been the centerpiece of the Federal Government's commitment to combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. It is an extraordinarily effective law, and the annual incidence of domestic violence has fallen by more than 50 percent since VAWA was first passed.

There is still much more that needs to be done. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, one in four women has been the victim of severe physical domestic violence, and one in five women has been raped in her lifetime. We must provide victims, service providers, and law enforcement with the tools they need to combat these horrific trends. That is why the Senate VAWA bill was developed based on the input of victims and the professionals who work with them every day.

The Senate recently came together in a bipartisan way to pass the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. A total of 78 Senators from both parties, including all women Senators and a majority of Republican Senators from states throughout the country, voted for this common sense measure. We are proud of the bipartisan support for VAWA in the Senate, and we hope you agree that this issue and this bill are above politics. If the House acts quickly to pass S. 47, serious crimes will be prevented, and victims of rape and domestic violence will receive the help they need. Recent statements and letters from Republican and Democratic House members suggests that a majority would support S. 47 if given the opportunity.

This important legislation renews successful programs that help law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service providers keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. It consolidates programs in order to reduce administrative costs and avoid duplication. The reauthorization is also mindful of our current fiscal state, and reduces authorizations by 17 percent from the 2005 reauthorization. New accountability measures are included in the Senate bill in order to ensure that VAWA funds are used wisely and efficiently.

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February 26, 2013

Page 2 of 2

The reauthorization bill provides important tools for law enforcement, victim service providers, and court personnel to identify high-risk victims and connect them to crisis intervention services. It encourages professionals to share their best practices, which have been proven to be effective, to prevent domestic violence homicides, and it includes measures to ensure an increased focus on sexual assault prevention, enforcement, and services. Additionally, the bill incorporates a consensus version of the SAFER Act, which takes additional important steps to reduce rape kit backlogs.

This reauthorization builds on existing efforts to more effectively combat violence against all victims and aims to ensure that VAWA programs reach more communities whose members need services. It addresses the ongoing crisis of violence against Native women, who face rates of domestic violence and sexual assault much higher than those faced by the general population, by strengthening existing programs and by narrowly expanding concurrent tribal criminal jurisdiction over those who assault Indian spouses and dating partners in Indian country. This provision would ensure that no perpetrators of abuse are immune from accountability, but would do so in a way that protects rights and ensures fairness.

Violence against women remains a critical problem in our nation. We cannot let victims of domestic and sexual violence continue to suffer. We hope you will work with us to quickly pass the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator