July 14, 2021

Dear Representative:

On behalf of YWCA USA, a network of over 200 local associations in 45 states and the District of Columbia, I write today to urge you to pass the Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2021 (H.R. 2119). Informed by our extensive history, the expertise of our nationwide network, and our collective commitment to meeting the needs of survivors and their families, we urge you to reauthorize this critical legislation without delay.

For over 160 years, YWCA has been on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Today, we serve over 2 million women, girls and family members of all ages and backgrounds in more than 1,200 communities. As the largest network of domestic and sexual violence service providers, over 150 YWCAs across 44 states remain on the front lines providing gender-based violence services—including safe and secure housing, crisis hotlines, counseling, court assistance, family justice centers, and other community and safety programs—to more than 535,000 women, children, and families annually.

As a result, YWCA saw first-hand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening the need for immediate funding, staffing, and unprecedented assistance to ensure women and families continued to receive much-needed relief during these uncertain times. According to YWCA internal surveys conducted toward the beginning of the pandemic, YWCAs who provided domestic violence shelter, sexual assault and domestic violence hotline services, and housing services have all seen increases in demand for services, many reaching maximum capacity. While YWCA is grateful that COVID-19 legislation provided support for nonprofits, including domestic violence service providers like YWCAs, to address the urgent health crisis, additional protections through the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) coupled with financial support will be required to maintain long-term protections for survivors and their families.

YWCAIs across the nation are on the frontline and continue to see the importance of maintaining protections for all survivors in the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act. If passed, this bill would provide funds for maintaining the safety, resources, and protections critical to all survivors, particularly women of color and other marginalized communities. Of particular importance, the bill includes the following YWCA supported provisions critical to survivors:

- **Increases the funding authorization** to better reflect the actual need for services and support on the ground in states, local communities, territories, and Tribes;
- **Strengthens provisions and updates definitions** to ensure access to services for all survivors and better reflects evolving best practices among service providers;

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• **Expands support for culturally specific programs** through a grant program to increase the capacity of community-based organizations to expand access to safety and other prevention programs and promote best practices;

• **Strengthens investments in prevention work** by bringing evidence-informed prevention initiatives to more states and local communities across the country while maintaining support for current prevention programs;

• **Provides grants to assist communities in mobilizing and organizing resources** to support underserved populations and marginalized survivors of domestic violence.

YWCA is creating a safer, more just world through our domestic violence and sexual assault services in communities across the country and continues to see the importance and urgency of this bill. FVPSA is critical, lifesaving legislation and it is time Congress took action to ensure individuals, organizations, and institutions are prepared to provide survivors with the necessary resources and support they rely on. **We urge you to pass Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2021 (H.R. 2119).**

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact Pam Yuen, YWCA USA Director of Government Relations, at pyuen@ywca.org or 202-559-7022 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Elisha Rhodes
Interim CEO & Chief Operating Officer