

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM
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**THE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
U.S. SENATE**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“THE NEED TO REAUTHORIZE THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT”
MARCH 20, 2018**



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Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit this statement for the record on the immediate need to reauthorize and fully support the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

Founded 160 years ago, YWCA is one of the oldest and largest women’s organizations serving over 2 million women, girls, and their families each year. There are 210 local YWCA associations in over 1,300 communities across 47 states and the District of Columbia. YWCA is the largest network of domestic violence service providers in the U.S. Every year, YWCAs provide more than 535,000 women with safety services, which include domestic violence and sexual assault programs and services such as emergency shelter, crisis hotlines, counseling and court assistance, and other community safety programs.

Within our network, more than 100 local YWCAs receive federal funding to support domestic violence and sexual assault services through VAWA and other programs. YWCA Union County (NJ), for example, received more than \$300,000 in VAWA and STOP funding to provide comprehensive, wrap-around domestic violence programs, including a hotline, medical advocacy, legal assistance, counseling, job readiness training, and prevention programs in the community and in area schools. And YWCA Dubuque (IA) provides a robust and comprehensive program that includes a domestic violence hotline, medical advocacy, emergency and transitional housing, legal assistance with criminal justice and court cases, counseling, case management, and financial literacy assistance. In addition to addressing violence and abuse when they occur, YWCA Dubuque also focuses on prevention by providing classes in schools and the community on healthy relationships and domestic and sexual violence.

Since its original passage in 1994, VAWA has made a tremendous impact in changing culture and norms, reducing domestic and sexual violence, and improving critical victim services. Yet much remains to be done to address the health and safety needs of survivors. Gender based violence in all its forms – whether that’s domestic violence in the home, sexual assault on college campuses, or harassment in the workplace – happens in every community. Whether you’re rich or poor, live in a red state or blue state, are new to this country or from a family that’s lived in the U.S. for generations, violence against women is a daily reality



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As Congress takes steps to reauthorize this critical law, YWCA urges all to be mindful that sexual assault and intimate partner violence cause long-term consequences for women's mental, emotional, physical and reproductive health. The effects of violence are often compounded by poverty, racism, and access to comprehensive health services, making the help-seeking and healing process much harder for some survivors. Chronic and long-term health impacts such as increased rates of cancer, stroke, and asthma along with substance abuse are also linked to a history of violence and abuse.

In addition, the intersection between this type of abuse and economic insecurity cannot be overstated. Between 21 and 60 percent of survivors of intimate partner violence lose their jobs for reasons related to their abuse. Approximately 50 percent of women who are homeless report that intimate partner violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness, and over 92 percent of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse during their lifetime.

Compounded with the devastating health, safety, and economic costs to survivors themselves, gender-based violence costs our health care systems, criminal justice systems, child welfare, and other safety net systems billions of dollars. Women who experience domestic violence are more likely to have been unemployed in the past, have health problems, experience homelessness and be receiving public assistance. Further, survivors of violence miss 8 million paid work days per year in the U.S., leading to losses in health care, housing, and employment. Based on estimates of the cost of intimate partner violence, studies have calculated that this type of violence costs about \$4.9 billion in the U.S. annually.

In line with our core mission of reducing inequity, we appreciate that Congress included immigrant, LGBTQ, and Native American/Alaska Native populations in the 2013 reauthorization of VAWA. While gender-based violence occurs across all races, ages, classes, and ethnic backgrounds, domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence occur at disparate rates and disproportionately impact women of color and other marginalized communities. Fifty-four percent of multi-racial women, 46 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native women, 43 percent of Black women, 37 percent of Latinas, 36 percent of White women, and 20 percent of Asian or Pacific Islander women have been the victim of intimate partner violence.

Everyday, we hear stories about how YWCA's programs—many of them supported by VAWA—have saved lives. Susan's story about the critical role that YWCA San Diego County played in her recovery is typical. Susan separated from her husband, but he continued to harass her, and his last attack resulted in near-fatal injuries. As soon as Susan was released from the hospital, she entered the YWCA's emergency shelter along with her two children. She had a full order of protection and her husband was arrested and charged with attempted murder. Susan did not know how she would provide for her children, since her husband did not allow her to work for 17 years. As a result, she had no work experience and had only completed high school. Susan and

her children transferred to YWCA San Diego's transitional housing program, where she received access to resources and support toward independent living. With her case manager's guidance, Susan enrolled in computer courses, earned three certificates, and began her job search. She quickly obtained a position at a legal office, enabling her to move her family into their own apartment. As they begin their next chapter, Susan continues to work and pursue her medical billing education.

VAWA is a critical resource to YWCA and so many other organizations who work daily to survivor needs. YWCA USA and our more than 100 local associations who rely on VAWA funding are here to support you in your efforts to quickly reauthorize VAWA, so this transformational law can continue helping survivors across the country. Please support a reauthorization of VAWA that maintains the safety, resources, and protections that have been critical to all survivors, particularly women of color and other marginalized communities.



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