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## **On Heels of First-Ever Senate Hearing on Intersection of Gun Violence and Domestic Violence, Gabby Giffords and Women Leaders Announce Leadership Network to Help Protect Women in U.S.**

*Network to Push for Action at Federal, State Levels*

*Women in U.S. 11 Times More Likely To Die From Gun Violence than Women in Peer Countries*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – On the heels of the first-ever Senate hearing on the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence today, former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and other national women leaders announced the #ProtectAllWomen Leadership Network to educate state and federal leaders on the need for solutions that protect women from gun violence.

Representing a broad cross section of the gun violence prevention, domestic violence prevention, and women’s advocacy movements, the groups will work to lay the foundation for action at the state and federal levels in the 2015 legislative sessions. Priorities include:

- Preventing stalkers and abusers from having easy access to guns;
- Expanding background checks to prevent criminals, domestic abusers and others who threaten us and our communities from accessing firearms; and,
- Strengthening existing federal, state and local policies and ensuring lawmakers and stakeholders have the resources and training they need to prevent and address gun violence against women.

Earlier today, the United States Senate Judiciary Committee held its first-ever hearing, titled “VAWA Next Steps: Protecting Women From Gun Violence,” on the nexus of guns and domestic violence and what Congress can do to protect women. Congresswoman Giffords delivered a petition to Senate Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy this spring signed by 37,000 Americans requesting today’s hearing.

“Dangerous people who get their hands on guns are a threat to women, families, and our communities. That’s why gun violence is a women’s issue,” **said Congresswoman Giffords.** “Today’s Senate Judiciary Committee hearing was an important first step on the road to strengthening our laws. So now it is time for leaders in Washington and across the country to come together - Republicans and Democrats – and pass legislation that helps protect women from gun violence. It is time for action. Women’s lives are at stake.”

The leadership network plans to focus on: 1) attracting new voices to efforts to protect women and families from gun violence and broadening the constituency of those advocating for stronger gun laws; 2) educating lawmakers and their constituents about the threat that guns in the wrong hands pose to women and families, and about commonsense protections from gun violence; and 3) organizing tables of concerned women at the state and local level to advocate progress in state legislatures. In September, members of the group plan a major organizing and advocacy push around the 20th anniversary of the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act, which falls on September 13, 2014.

In addition to Congresswoman Giffords, members of the Leadership Network include:

- Angela Rye, Principal and CEO, IMPACT Strategies;
- Carol Robles-Roman, President and CEO, Legal Momentum;
- Chief Janee Harteau, Police Chief, Minneapolis Police Department;
- Dara Richardson-Heron, M.D., CEO, YWCA USA;
- Deborah D. Tucker, Executive Director, National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence;
- Desiree Hoffman, Director of Advocacy and Policy, YWCA USA;
- Esta Soler, President, Futures Without Violence;
- Katie Ray-Jones, President & CEO, National Domestic Violence Hotline;
- Kiersten Stewart, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Futures Without Violence;
- Kim Gandy, President & CEO, National Network to End Domestic Violence;
- Kristin Rowe-Feinkebeiner, Executive Director/CEO, MomsRising;
- Lanae Erickson, Director of Social Policy & Politics, Third Way;
- Lisalyn Jacobs, Vice President for Government Relations, Legal Momentum;
- Lori Haas, Virginia State Director, The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence;
- Lori Weinstein, CEO/Executive Director, Jewish Women International;
- Mai Fernandez, Executive Director, National Center for Victims of Violence;
- Margaret Huang, Deputy Executive Director for Campaigns and Programs, Amnesty International USA;

- Maria Teresa Kumar, CEO/President, Voto Latino;
- Megan Lewis, Executive Vice President, Everytown for Gun Safety;
- Melanie Campbell, Convener, Black Women's Roundtable, and CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation;
- Monika Johnson Hostler, President, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence;
- Neera Tanden, President, Center for American Progress;
- Nicole Hockley, Communications Director, Sandy Hook Promise;
- Page Gardner, Founder and President, Voter Participation Center;
- Paulette Sullivan Moore, Vice President of Public Policy, National Network to End Domestic Violence;
- Rob Valente, Policy Expert, National Domestic Violence Hotline;
- Robyn Thomas, Executive Director, Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence;
- Shannon Watts, Founder, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America;
- Terry O'Neill, President, National Organization for Women;
- Shaunna Thomas, Co-Founder, Ultra Violet; and
- Winnie Stachelberg, Executive Vice President, External Affairs, Center for American Progress.

“The connection between gun violence and domestic violence is unmistakable,” **said Neera Tanden, President of the Center for American Progress**, one of the key groups supporting the Network. “Every day in the United States, five women are murdered with guns and many of these women are killed by intimate partners. This is unacceptable. We must do more to keep firearms out of the hands of stalkers and abusers. At the Center for American Progress, we have been working over the past year to raise awareness about the danger to American women from gun violence and to advocate for policy solutions to better protect women. I look forward to continuing this important work as part of the Protect All Women Leadership Network.”

“Every day, our advocates hear from women who are suffering from life-threatening abuse. Too many of these stories involve threats of firearms violence by abusers. We cannot afford to let them live in fear any longer,” **said Katie Ray-Jones, President and CEO of the National Domestic Violence Hotline**. “The time to act is now, and the creation of this leadership network is an important first step toward ending that violence.”

“Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be killed with firearms than women in other high income countries, and more than three times as many women in this country are murdered with guns used by intimate partners than by any combination of stranger’s guns, knives or other weapons combined,” **said Kim Gandy, President & CEO, National Network to End Domestic Violence**. “I look forward to the impact this group will have on substantially changing these statistics.”

“As one of the largest providers of domestic violence services across the country, I firmly believe that it is time for Congress to have a real dialogue about the alarming correlation between gun violence and domestic violence,” **said YWCA USA CEO Dara Richardson-Heron, M.D.** “Passing common-sense legislation that protects women and families from gun violence is the unfinished business of the Violence Against Women Act, and Congress must work to ensure that it happens before countless more lives are lost.”

“Keeping guns out of the hands of criminals is the #1 thing we can do to prevent gun violence. Right now in many states, a stalker or domestic abuser can walk into a gun show and purchase a weapon, or jump online and surf through his many semi-automatic choices on Armslist.com,” **said Lanae Erickson, Director of Social Policy & Politics, Third Way.** “That threatens the safety of women, of children, and of our community as a whole. States that have closed these loopholes have seen a 38% decrease in women being shot and killed by their domestic abuser. Those who would protect an abuser’s ability to buy a gun without a background check are making women less safe.”

“We are honored to be part of this important initiative joining Congresswoman Giffords and so many others around the country who are committed to protecting women and preventing violence by advocating for common sense gun laws that keep all women and families safe from domestic abusers,” **said Mai Fernandez, Executive Director of the National Center for Victims of Crime.**

“There is no doubt that guns make a domestic violence situation deadly. Far too many women are dying at the hands of their abusers due to easy access to guns in this country. The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence is committed to educating the American public and legislators nationwide on the facts regarding the lethal combination of guns and domestic abuse,” **said Robyn Thomas, Executive Director of the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.** “As a nation, must do everything we can to protect women from domestic abusers and stalkers by closing these dangerous loopholes in our federal and state laws. Doing so will truly save lives.”

“Time and time again, we have seen that guns and domestic violence are a lethal mix. When an individual with a demonstrated history of domestic abuse or stalking decides to use a gun, the results are usually deadly for women. Stronger laws that help keep guns out of the hands of those known to use domestic and sexual violence and stalking will help protect women and make our communities safer,” **said Deborah D. Tucker, Executive Director, National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence.**

“Violence against all women has reached epidemic proportions; negatively impacting women, children and the communities where they live. The Black Women’s Roundtable recently released a report that found ‘Black women are especially likely to be a victim of violence in America. In fact, no woman is more likely to be murdered in America today than a Black woman. No woman is more likely to be raped than a Black woman’, **said Melanie Campbell, Convener, Black Women's Roundtable, and CEO, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation.** “We already know the statistics are frightening for women across America. It’s

time for the US legislators to get serious about protecting all women against violence. We must do everything in our power to prevent criminals who threaten us and our communities from accessing firearms including bolstering existing laws to protect women so they feel empowered to confront their perpetrator in court.”

"The relationship between guns and domestic violence is deadly – in fact, research has found that the presence of a gun makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed,” **said Shannon Watts, Founder of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America.** “That’s why Moms and Americans are coming together to call on our elected leaders to fix the loopholes in our laws that make it easy for domestic abusers to get and keep guns – and we’re already making progress. In the last year, we helped pass laws in six states that will keep guns out of abusers’ hands. We’re going to keep fighting for public safety measures in more states and at the federal level because women’s lives are on the line.”

"Critical gaps in the law allow too many abusers to buy and use guns — and put women’s lives at risk. But the good news is that stronger gun laws will help save women’s lives. We know this is true because in states that require background checks for all handgun sales, 38 percent fewer women are shot to death by their intimate partners,” **said Megan Lewis, Executive Vice President, Everytown for Gun Safety.** “That’s why we’re pushing Congress and state legislatures to close the loopholes that make it easy for domestic abusers and stalkers to get and keep guns. It’s time for political leaders to take action.”

Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be murdered by a gun than women in other high-income countries, and abused women are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if the abuser owns a firearm. In 36 states, more than half of intimate partner-related homicides of women in each state involved a gun. In addition, stalking affects one in six women in the United States, and more than three-quarters female intimate partner homicide victims were stalked prior to being murdered.

Current federal law prohibits convicted domestic abusers from legally buying guns. However, individuals who have been convicted of misdemeanor stalking are not prohibited from purchasing firearms; they can still pass a background check and buy a gun through the so-called ‘stalker gap’. Another gap in federal law exists where the law prevents convicted domestic abusers from firearms access but excludes those in dating relationships from that same protection. This leaves women in dating relationships who are not married, do not live with their partner, or do not share a child in common vulnerable to abuse that can be lethal. In fact, in 2008, nearly half of all domestic violence homicides were committed against a current or former dating partner.

Additionally, convicted domestic abusers (who are prohibited from gun access) can evade the law and still purchase a gun at a gun show or on the Internet, where sales of guns do not require a background check.

This past year has seen bipartisan momentum for laws aimed at preventing gun violence against women. In 2014, six states – Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin – have enacted domestic gun violence legislation that will protect women with overwhelming support from both political parties.

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Americans for Responsible Solutions (ARS) is working across the country to build an organization with millions of people committed to finding sensible ways to reduce gun violence and encouraging elected officials to enact responsible firearms policies that protect the Second Amendment. Today, ARS stands more than 500,000 strong.

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