

Leahy, Crapo Propose Bill to Reauthorize Landmark Violence Against Women Act

WASHINGTON (Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2011) – Nearly 20 years after the Violence Against Women Act was first signed into law, U.S. Senators Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) introduced legislation (S.1925) Wednesday to further strengthen and improve the programs authorized under the landmark law to assist victims and survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was first enacted in 1994, and has been the centerpiece of the federal government's efforts to stamp out domestic and sexual violence. Critical programs authorized under VAWA include support for victim services, transitional housing, and legal assistance.

"The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act reflects Congress's ongoing commitment to end domestic and sexual violence," **said Leahy**. "It seeks to expand the law's focus on sexual assault and to ensure access to services for all victims of domestic and sexual violence. The Violence Against Women Act has been successful because it has consistently had strong bipartisan support for nearly two decades. I am honored to work now with Senator Crapo to build on that foundation. I hope that Senators from both parties will support this bill, which will provide safety and security for victims across America."

"These dollars go directly to woman and children who have been victimized by domestic violence," **Crapo said**. "The reauthorization of VAWA provides critical services to these victims of violent crime, as well as agencies and organizations who provide important aid to those individuals. I have been a strong supporter of prevention and elimination of domestic abuse since coming to Congress, and I intend to continue to fight to keep these funds intact for women and children."

The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act includes several updates and improvements to the law, including:

- An emphasis on the need to effectively respond to sexual assault crime by adding new purpose areas and a 25 percent set-aside in the STOP state formula grant program and the Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program;
- Improvements in tools to prevent domestic violence homicides by training law enforcement, victim service providers, and court personnel on identifying and managing high risk offenders and connecting high risk victims to crisis intervention services;

- Improvements in responses to the high rate of violence against women in tribal communities by strengthening concurrent tribal criminal jurisdiction over perpetrators who assault Indian spouses and dating partners in Indian country;
- Measures to strengthen housing protections for victims by applying existing housing protections to nine additional federal housing programs;
- Measures to promote accountability to ensure that federal funds are used for their intended purposes;
- Consolidation of programs and reductions in authorizations levels to address fiscal concerns, and renewed focus on programs that have been most successful;
- Technical corrections to updates definitions throughout the law to provide uniformity and continuity throughout the law.

The Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized in 2000 and again in 2005, each time with bipartisan support. The law expired in September. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act will provide a five year authorization for VAWA programs, and reduce authorized funding levels by more than \$144 million, or 19 percent, from the law's 2005 authorization.

The Leahy-Crapo legislation also includes important all-state minimum funding formulas for key grant programs, to ensure that small, rural states like Vermont and Idaho have access to the victim services grants authorized under VAWA, including STOP grants, grants under the Sexual Assault Services Program, the Rural Program, Rape Prevention Education grants, and transitional housing grants.

#####

[Text of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011](#)

[Section-By-Section Analysis of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011](#)

#####

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
on the Introduction of the
“Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011”
November 30, 2011**

Today, I am proud to introduce the bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011 and to be joined by Senator Crapo in doing so. 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. We should reauthorize and strengthen these programs.

Since VAWA’S passage in 1994, no other law has done more to stop domestic and sexual violence in our communities. The resources and training provided by VAWA have changed attitudes toward these reprehensible crimes, improved the response of law enforcement and the justice system, and provided essential services for victims struggling to rebuild their lives. It is a law that has saved countless lives, and it is an example of what we can accomplish when we work together.

As a prosecutor in Vermont, I saw firsthand the destruction caused by domestic and sexual violence. Those were the days before VAWA, when too often people dismissed these serious crimes with a joke, and there were few, if any, services for victims. We have come a long way since then, but there is much more we must do.

Over the last few years, the Senate Judiciary Committee has held several hearings on VAWA in anticipation of this reauthorization. We have heard from people from all around the country, and they have told us the same thing I hear from service providers, experts, and law enforcement officers in Vermont: While we have made great strides in reducing domestic violence and sexual assault, these difficult problems remain, and there is more work to be done.

The victim services funded by VAWA play a particularly critical role in these difficult economic times. The economic pressures of a lost job or home can add stress to an already abusive relationship and can make it even harder for victims to rebuild their lives. At the same time, state budget cuts are resulting in fewer available services. Just this summer, Topeka, Kansas, took the drastic step of decriminalizing domestic violence because the city did not have the funds needed to prosecute these cases. We can and must do better than that. Budgets are tight, but we cannot simply turn our backs on these victims. For many, the programs funded through the Violence Against Women Act are nothing short of a life line.

In Vermont, VAWA funding helped the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence provide services to more than 7,000 adults and nearly 1,400 children last year alone. These women and men, and girls and boys, received shelter, counseling, legal advocacy and access to transitional housing – lifesaving services to help them recover from unspeakable trauma and abuse.

In one case, a mother of three children living in rural Vermont endured a long and abusive marriage in which she was not allowed to get an independent job or even a driver's license. For most of her adult life, she was subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse by her husband. After she summoned the courage to call a domestic violence hotline, her husband was arrested. Advocates helped her find temporary housing and gain access to a lawyer who helped her navigate the criminal process and establish supervised visitation for her children. Because of funding provided by VAWA, she and her children are safe and living independently. The lives of this woman and her children are just a few examples of how VAWA is having a real impact in our communities.

I have heard stories like this time and again from victims and advocates in Vermont and across the country. Without this critical funding, state and local programs like the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence will not be able to provide their services to victims in desperate need.

The reauthorization bill that I am introducing with Senator Crapo reflects Congress's ongoing commitment to end domestic and sexual violence. It seeks to expand the law's focus on sexual assault, to ensure access to services for all victims of domestic and sexual violence, and to address the crisis of domestic and sexual violence in tribal communities, among other important steps. It also responds to these difficult economic times by consolidating programs, reducing authorization levels, and adding accountability measures to ensure that Federal funds are used efficiently and effectively.

The Violence Against Women Act has been successful because it has consistently had strong bipartisan support for nearly two decades. Today, we build on that foundation. I hope that Senators from both parties will join us to quickly pass this critical reauthorization, which will provide safety and security for victims across America.

#