

Celebrating Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act

by Bea Hanson

Today President Obama signed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA) of 2013, marking an historic day in our nation's effort to reduce domestic and sexual violence. A week ago today Congress reauthorized this landmark bill, which maintains proven successful programs and includes significant new provisions that expand and improve the federal government's response to violence against women.

OVW is proud to have been part of the tremendous effort to reauthorize VAWA. I am honored to have stood with you in the fight for legislation that defends the rights of all victims and survivors. The new tribal provisions are of particular importance to all of us at the Department of Justice. VAWA 2013 closes jurisdictional gaps that had long compromised American Indian and Alaska Native women's safety and access to justice. This change supports the sovereignty of tribes and holds perpetrators accountable – a necessary step to reducing violence against Native women.

The reauthorization of VAWA also ensures that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survivors have access to the services they need and deserve, enables victims in publicly subsidized housing to stay safe by transferring to a different unit or location, and adds protections for college students, who have some of the highest rates of rape in the nation. I could not agree more with Attorney General Eric Holder, who said, "I applaud Congress for passing a bipartisan reauthorization that protects everyone – women and men, gay and straight, children and adults of all races, ethnicities, countries of origin, and tribal affiliations."

The OVW staff and I are excited to work with all of you in the coming months to turn this legislation into reality. And it's not just our office – the whole Department is engaged. As the Attorney General said, "The Department of Justice looks forward to implementing this historic legislation."

Most of the changes to VAWA don't take effect until FY 2014, but we're starting work on them now. A big part of that will be hearing from you. We want to hear from survivors, advocates, law enforcement, and all our grantees and other stakeholders across the country. In fact, one of the new VAWA provisions requires us to consult with stakeholders within six months.

Over the next several months, we will be communicating with you about the new VAWA provisions in multiple ways – webinars, conference calls, new grantee orientations, TA provider meetings, fact sheets and more. OVW has always welcomed your input, and we need it now more than ever. Together we can strengthen the safety of our communities and ensure hope and healing is a reality for all survivors.

The full text of VAWA 2013 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113s47enr/pdf/BILLS-113s47enr.pdf>.

For more information, please visit www.ovw.usdoj.gov.

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