

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (Ca-34) Introduces the Safe Act to Ensure Economic Stability for Victims of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 27 – Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif. (34th CD), issued the following news release:

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX) today introduced the Security and Financial Empowerment Act (SAFE Act - HR 3271) to ensure that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking have the financial independence they need to break free from their abusers.

"Domestic Violence Awareness Month is a fitting time to address the awful consequences of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Not only do these crimes have serious physical and psychological impacts on victims, but the economic consequences perpetuate the abuse. Many victims stay with or return to their abusers because they are financially dependent on them," said Rep. Roybal-Allard (D-CA). "I have introduced the SAFE Act with my Republican colleague Ted Poe of Texas to break the cycle of violence by providing victims with employment and financial protections to safely leave abusive situations. This bipartisan effort sets politics aside to help victims of domestic violence who are in urgent need of assistance."

"Victims of domestic violence need time to seek medical care and necessary assistance just like anyone else suffering with health issues. I'm proud to co-sponsor the SAFE Act to ensure these victims have the time they need recover and rebuild their lives," said Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX).

"The SAFE Act is an important step forward in helping women who are being abused and their children stay safe," said Esta Soler, president and founder of Futures Without Violence. "We commend Congresswoman Roybal-Allard and Congressman Ted Poe for helping women keep their jobs and protect themselves economically so they never have to choose between staying with their batterer, and poverty or homelessness. Importantly, the bill also recognizes the role employers play in fighting domestic violence and sexual assault by continuing authorization for the National Workplace Resource Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence."

The SAFE Act gives victims the tools and opportunities to securely make the often difficult choice to seek help or leave an abusive situation.

The SAFE Act would help victims of domestic violence by:

- Allowing a domestic violence survivor to take up to 30 days off from work in a 12-month period to receive medical attention, seek legal assistance, attend court proceedings and get help with safety planning.

- Protecting employees from being fired because they were harassed by their abuser, obtained protective orders, participated in the criminal or civil justice process, or sought modifications at work to increase workplace safety in response to domestic or sexual violence.
- Requiring employers to make reasonable safety precautions or job-related modifications if requested unless doing so would impose an undue burden on the employer.
- Ensuring that victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking who have been separated from their employment as a result of such violence, are eligible for unemployment insurance.
- The SAFE Act also reauthorizes the Workplace Resource Center, which was created during the last reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). With this authorization, the Director of the Office on Violence Against Women is authorized to award grants to eligible nonprofit nongovernmental or tribal organizations in order to provide for the establishment and operation of a national resource center on workplace responses to assist victims of domestic and sexual violence. The SAFE Act would also make victim services organizations eligible for grants.

Currently 40 states and the District of Columbia have laws or regulations that explicitly provide unemployment insurance to domestic violence victims in certain circumstances, and none of the laws explicitly cover victims of sexual assault or stalking. The SAFE Act would replace the uneven and often insufficient protections offered by existing state laws with a federal standard that would apply uniformly throughout the nation

A longtime advocate on behalf of victims of domestic and sexual violence, Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard has introduced this legislation in every Congress since 1996. An earlier provision of the SAFE Act was enacted into law as part of the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. That provision created an electronic National Resource Center on Workplace Responses to Domestic Violence. Futures Without Violence leads a partnership of eight organizations in conducting the National Resource Center and has been a significant force for more than a decade in helping women keep their jobs in the face of abuse from a partner, while helping employers keep their workplaces safe.