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Violence Against Women

Violence against women affects the lives of countless women and their families across the United States. Daily women and girls of all ages, income levels and race-ethnicities are victims of crime including domestic violence, stalking, rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, the trafficking, date rape, verbal abuse and harassment and hate crimes. And many more women are living their lives as survivors of violence.

In 1994, Congress passed the landmark Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The law established a comprehensive approach to addressing and ending violence against women. VAWA provides a framework for collaboration that included federal, state and local governments, social service providers, law enforcement personnel, prosecutors and the courts. VAWA proved to be a remarkable success at addressing and ending violence against women and girls and has twice been reauthorized.

Key provisions of VAWA include:

- creating the Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE (7233));
- providing assistance to address domestic violence, rape and sexual assault and providing assistance to victims;
- creating provisions to address the needs of battered immigrant women and children, enhancing penalties for repeat sex offenders;
- increasing criminal penalties for crimes against women including domestic violence, rape and sexual assault;
- establishing initiatives to address the impact of domestic violence on children;
- defining dating violence and providing funding to address dating violence;
- addressing violence on college campuses;
- recognizing the unique needs of disabled and older victims of violence;
- providing transitional housing assistance and services to domestic violence victims who are homeless and in need of housing and;
- improving the laws regarding protection orders, sex offender registration and interstate domestic violence.

The Violence Against Women Act also created a number of grants to combat violence against women and girls. VAWA established grants to create and improve law enforcement and prosecution strategies on the state and local levels and to provide services to victims. The measure also established grants to state and local governments to address rural domestic violence and child abuse, grants for battered women's shelters, and grants to address and prevent sexual assault among homeless and runaway youth.

Supporters of ending violence against women argue that violence against women impacts the lives of many women and their families in the United States. They also argue that the success of Violence Against Women Act has proven that it is possible to combat violence against women. Yet there is more work that needs to be done, including eliminating violence against young women and girls and women of color, and addressing the economic consequences of violence on victims.

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While there is much bi-partisan support for VAWA, opponents have argued that the measure is not necessary and that too much focus has been put on women as victims and not as perpetrators of violence. Opponents of VAWA also maintain that the law's definition of violence is too broad and that the issue does not warrant federal funding.

YWCA Position

The YWCA supports public policies that protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable and work to eradicate sexual assault and domestic violence, trafficking of women and dating violence. The YWCA recognizes the need for anti-violence programs and policies to be culturally sensitive in both their approaches to combating violence against women and in responding to victims of violence. Specifically, we support the continuance and full funding for the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The YWCA also supports legislation that ensures employment stability and economic security for victims of violence against women.

Candidate Questions

What is your position on the Violence Against Women Act?

If elected what will you do to help prevent and end violence against women?

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Victims of Crime Act Fund

In 1984 as part of the Victims of Crime Act, Congress created the Victims of Crime Fund (VOCA). The VOCA fund provides money for victim assistance programs and victim compensation programs and is made up entirely of money collected from penalties, fees and fines that have been paid by federal criminals. The VOCA fund contains no taxpayer dollars. Money in the fund supports investigating and prosecuting child abuse, providing assistance to victims involved in federal criminal investigations, prosecutions and crimes, and, for grants to states to support victim services and victim compensation.

VOCA is an important source of funding for addressing violence against women. Both the VOCA state victim assistance grant and the VOCA compensation grant are provided to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The VOCA state victim assistance grant support direct victim services including rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, counseling programs, support groups, advocacy, and case management services. The VOCA compensation grant provides financial reimbursement to victims of violent crimes for out-of-pocket medical expenses and mental health counseling.

Between 1984 and 2007, a total of \$9 billion dollars was deposited into the VOCA fund. However, because the fund is comprised of money collected from penalties, fees and fines, money in the fund fluctuates from year to year. Today, the fund is estimated to have a balance of \$1.7 billion. In 2000, to address the fluctuation in money in the VOCA fund, Congress took action to stabilize the amount in the fund. Congress limited (capped) the amount of money that could be removed each year from the fund ensuring money will be available for victims in the future. Since 2006, the VOCA cap has been lowered every year. And while the cap on the VOCA fund limits the amount of funding available for VOCA programs every year, the consistent lowering of the cap means less money is available over time. In addition, as money is increased for various other VOCA programs, less funding is available for victims' assistance. Both the continued lowering of the cap and the distribution of money is resulting in cuts to victim assistance programs throughout the country.

Supporters of raising the cap on the VOCA fund argue that victim assistance programs funded with VOCA grants are facing significant financial challenges as a result of lowering the VOCA cap and the continued distribution of money away from victims' assistance. Supporters of raising the cap argue that women and girls who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking may not receive the assistance they need unless the VOCA cap is raised so that VOCA money to assist victims can increase. There is no oppositional group or argument against raising the VOCA cap.

YWCA Position

The Victim of Crime Act Fund (VOCA) assists women who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking receive services that help them heal and rebuild their lives. However, continued cuts undermine the ability of women and girls to receive services that can assist them.

Candidate Questions

What is your position on the Victim of Crime Act Fund?

Would you support raising the cap of the VOCA Fund?

If elected what will you do to help prevent and end violence against women?