



STOP ABUSIVE AND VIOLENT ENVIRONMENTS

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October 19, 2011

RE: Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act

Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy:

Stop Abusive and Violent Environments is a victim advocacy organization working for evidence-based solutions to domestic violence. We advocate on behalf of *all* victims of domestic violence, regardless of sex, gender identity, or other characteristics. Our mission is inspired by President Obama's call for policies to be evidence-based and scientifically credible.

It is our understanding that you will be introducing a bill in the near future designed to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. We also understand this bill will feature a new teen dating violence prevention focus – we applaud you for your attention to this issue.

Regarding dating violence among teenagers and young adults, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control has documented the following:

- Teenage girls are 25% more likely to engage in dating violence than their male peers. (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm#tab11>)
- Among young adults, half of all domestic violence is mutual, and 71% of one-way partner aggression is instigated by females. (Whitaker D. *American Journal of Public Health*, June 2007. <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/97/5/941>)

Similar patterns have been documented among other populations -- <http://csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm> . For a variety of reasons, however, men are less likely to report the abuse or call for help.

In addition, female initiation of partner violence is the leading reason for the woman becoming a victim of subsequent violence. (Stith S, Smith DB, Penn CE, et al. Intimate partner physical abuse perpetration and victimization risk factors: A meta-analytic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* Vol. 10, 2004. pp. 65-98.)

Our delight in learning of the teen dating violence initiative is tempered, however, by the fact that many domestic violence training and education programs have been shown to lack factual accuracy and to be biased in their presentation.

SAVE's Special Report, Most DV Educational Programs Lack Accuracy, Balance, and Truthfulness documents how the great majority of DV educational programs systematically depict males as abusers and females as victims: <http://www.saveservices.org/downloads/SAVE-DV-Educational-Programs>.

Such biased portrayals call to mind the harmful stereotypes espoused a century ago of African-American men. *If we want to bring an end to the cycle of violence, we must challenge these pernicious depictions as antithetical to efforts to end all forms of partner abuse, whether initiated by males or females.*

Therefore, we are requesting that you assure that the forthcoming VAWA bill include the following language:

Eligibility. Grantees must certify that all training, education, and public awareness training programs and activities, including each of its instructional manuals, curricula, handouts, and other informational content, are currently accredited by an independent Training, Education, and Public Awareness Accreditation Organization; that the Training, Education, and Public Awareness Accreditation Organization is allowed to conduct audits of said training and education sessions; and that evidence of said accreditation is made publicly available on all instructional materials and the organization's website.

This language should appear in all sections of VAWA that authorize any training, education, or public awareness programs. More information about such accreditation programs can be found here: <http://www.saveservices.org/accreditation/>

In addition, we would like the following Findings to be presented at the beginning of Sections III and IV of the Violence Against Women Act:

1. According to a 2007 survey by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, teenage boys are 25% more likely than girls to be victims of dating violence. (Eaton DK et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2007. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, June 6, 2008. Table 11. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm#tab11>)
2. One study of university dating couples concluded that 70% of all physical abuse was mutual. (Straus MA. Dominance and symmetry in partner violence by male and female university students in 32 nations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2008. <http://pubpages.unh.edu/%7Eemas2/ID41-PR41-Dominance-symmetry-In-Press-07.pdf>)

Other needed changes to strengthen and amend the Violence Against Women Act can be found here: <http://www.saveservices.org/pvra/>

We look forward to working with you and other members of the Senate to bring about the speedy reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

Sincerely,

Edward E. Bartlett

Edward E. Bartlett, PhD, President

Cc: Sen. Charles Grassley, Ranking Member