



Legislation Text

File #: 180768, Version: 0

Urging Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which helps to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

WHEREAS, VAWA, which was first passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013, provides grants for victim services and violence prevention efforts. It was the first piece of federal legislation to address domestic violence as a serious crime and established the National Domestic Violence Hotline. VAWA not only saves lives but it also saves money. According to the National Task Force to End Sexual & Domestic Violence, in its first six years of implementation, VAWA saved taxpayers at least \$12.6 billion in averted social costs. VAWA expires this month and lawmakers must act to renew it; and

WHEREAS, In the U.S., about 1 in 3 women experience physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in her lifetime. Eighty-five percent of domestic violence victims are women. In Philadelphia, the police department receives over 100,000 emergency 911 calls related to domestic abuse each year. Last year, thirteen domestic violence deaths occurred in Philadelphia, the most of any county in Pennsylvania. As of mid-August, Philadelphia recorded its 21st domestic killing of 2018. This number is up 50% compared to this time last year; and

WHEREAS, Firearms are the most common weapons in domestic violence related homicides. A woman is killed by an intimate partner with a gun every 16 hours. According to Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2017 saw the highest number of domestic abuse related deaths caused by firearms in 10 years in Pennsylvania. Out of 117 domestic violence deaths, 78 deaths were caused by gun violence; and

WHEREAS, Domestic violence incidents are some of the most dangerous calls to which police respond. A study by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund found that more officers were killed responding to domestic violence calls than responding to any other dispatched calls for service. VAWA provides grants for law enforcement training in the area of domestic violence, specifically in removing firearms from perpetrators of domestic abuse who are not legally allowed to have them; and

WHEREAS, This aspect of VAWA is particularly important in Pennsylvania because of the uncertain status of bipartisan legislation aimed at keeping firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers. This legislation has been approved unanimously by the Senate this spring but failed to advance in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Escaping an abuser can often mean a victim faces homelessness. According to Women Against Abuse, on an average night, 250 homeless individuals in Philadelphia self-identify as victims of domestic violence. VAWA strengthens existing protections for survivors and addresses gaps in services by providing housing assistance for victims. This includes protecting domestic violence victims from eviction from public housing if their abuser breaks the law and allowing them to more easily transfer apartments; and

WHEREAS, In 2017 Pennsylvania received \$12,929,236 in grant awards from The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), the federal office that administers grant programs authorized by VAWA. Only six states

received more funds. Philadelphia received \$899,666 in 2017 as part of a grant to improve criminal justice responses to domestic violence. Pennsylvania uses VAWA funds for its “STOP Violence Against Women Act Program” which provides grants focused on specialized units of law enforcement and prosecution, victim services, and preventative training. In 2012, federal STOP funding was used to serve 16,056 victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, VAWA helps organizations in Philadelphia fight domestic and sexual violence. Women Against Abuse received \$549,369 from OVW in 2017 which it used to provide legal support in Protection From Abuse cases, outreach to high risk victims, rental assistance and housing support, and prevention education for Philadelphia’s youth. Other recipients included the Mazzoni Center and Saint Joseph’s University. In the past, VAWA has awarded grants to Community Legal Services, Philadelphia Legal Assistance, HIAS Pennsylvania, and Women Organized Against Rape to assist survivors of sexual assault in housing and employment cases. If VAWA is not reauthorized this month, these programs would lose capacity to help prevent and respond to domestic violence; and

WHEREAS, For these reasons, VAWA is crucial to the safety and well-being of Philadelphia’s most vulnerable citizens and, therefore, its reauthorization is critically important; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA, The City Council urges Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which helps to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.