



The Violence Against Women Act of Reauthorization of 2021

H.R. 1620

Background:

In recognition of the severe and pervasive nature of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This was a landmark bill, and the first comprehensive federal legislative package aimed at ending violence against women through extensive, effective, and cost-saving responses. VAWA programs are administered by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) at the Department of Justice.

VAWA is up for renewal every five years and has been reauthorized in 2000, 2005, and 2013. Each reauthorization allowed for new innovations and expansions in funding to build upon existing protections and programs that serve survivors.

VAWA 2000

- Created legal assistance programs for survivors
- Added responses to dating violence and stalking

VAWA 2005

- Introduced inclusive response programs to meet the evolving needs of survivors and communities.
- Added prevention education funding, housing protections for survivors, **Rape Crisis Center funding**, and culturally and linguistically-specific services

VAWA 2013

- Improved access to safety and justice options for Native American and LGBTQ+ survivors

VAWA lapsed in 2018, following the U.S. federal government shutdown in 2018-2019. An effort to reauthorize VAWA passed the House of Representatives in 2019 with a new provision that sought to close the "boyfriend loophole" by extending the law that restricts perpetrators' ability to purchase firearms, after conviction of partner abuse or stalking charges, to include current and former dating partners. Current law only prohibits firearm purchases for individuals who are "married to, lived with, or have a child with the victim" and who have been convicted of a partner abuse felony or have a protection order against them. The National Rifle Association strongly opposed the "boyfriend-loophole" provision. This pressure was a key influence in the ultimate failure of the 2019 reauthorization effort.

Although VAWA expired in 2018, current funding programs are still in effect; this means that funding programs that existed prior to the 2018 expiration will continue to operate and provide grant programs for specific populations and victim service categories. However, expansions in funding for new or emerging survivor needs will not take place until the next reauthorization. The following page details the VAWA 2021 Reauthorization Act that proposes several new expansions in funding for programs and research.

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The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021

On March 8th, 2021, a bipartisan bill to renew and expand VAWA was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Among other things, H.R.1620 seeks to maintain existing protections for survivors and:

Indigenous Protections

- Restore tribal jurisdiction to end impunity for non-native perpetrators of sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, elder abuse, assault against law enforcement officers, and trafficking when they commit offenses on tribal lands.
- Authorize and expand programs offering sexual assault medical forensic exams and sexual assault victim services in Indigenous Communities

LGBTQ

- New LGBTQ+ specific grants and services to LGBTQ+ victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking
- Implement VAWA non-discrimination requirements to guarantee equal access to VAWA protections for all survivors regardless of gender

Housing & Economic Support

- Provide options for survivors in federally-assisted housing to: relocate to safe housing with relocation vouchers; maintain housing after a perpetrator leaves; or terminate a lease early
- Offer economic justice options to improve survivor access to unemployment insurance and help identify what constitutes economic abuse
- Require the Department of Health and Human Services to study and report on the impact of COVID-19 on survivors' ability to maintain economic security
- Ensure survivor access to transitional housing and protect against unfair evictions and denials of service

Education

- Direct the Secretary of Education to provide a climate survey for colleges and universities to administer to students on their experiences with sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking, and dating violence
- Require the Secretary of Education to confirm that local educational agencies establish full-time Title IX coordinators in K-12 schools to better support school survivors
- Establish an Interagency Task Force on Sexual Violence in Education to report information on-campus sexual violence prevention and response, as well as how to better assist survivors

Prevention

- Invest in prevention through the Rape Prevention and Education Program and VAWA Department of Justice prevention programs

Why This Bill is Important:

- Improves access to housing and economic support for survivors
- Continues the effort to close dangerous legal loopholes in current federal domestic violence firearm laws to protect unmarried survivors from potential gun violence and homicide
- Provides paths to justice that focus on survivor autonomy, agency, and safety and expanded access to VAWA-funded legal services for survivors

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