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***It's Time for Congress to Pass the Violence Against Women Act***

By Sarah Buel<sup>1</sup>

They are run over by cars and buried alive. They have their teeth smashed out with hammers and are raped with objects. They are strangled and dumped in remote areas to die. They are tied up and forced to watch the sexual molestation of their children. They are drugged and forced into prostitution. Am I describing atrocities committed against women and children in foreign countries at war? No, these are American intimate partner violence cases with which I've worked as a prosecutor, advocate, and clinic director over the past 35 years.

As an abuse survivor, I am proud to have been part of the team that drafted the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), testified before Congress, and finally, saw its bi-partisan passage in 1994 and its bi-partisan reauthorization in 2000 and 2005. There are at least five good reasons why Congress should reauthorize VAWA and provide appropriate funding before its members go home for the holidays.

**First, the statistics are staggering:** The Dept. of Justice reports that about *four American women are murdered each day* by a current or former partner. If foreign terrorists were killing four Americans a day, we'd likely fire up the F-16s, reinstitute a mandatory draft, and assign National Guard troops throughout the land. The American Medical Association asserts that American women are in more danger in their homes than on the street – a situation VAWA can help change.

**Second, VAWA is highly effective, essential legislation funding critical programs that otherwise could not exist:** These services are the difference between life and death for many female and male victims of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. VAWA will augment judicial and law enforcement tools, improve housing and economic security for victims, strengthen America's families by preventing violence, enhance the healthcare system's response, and increase safety for high-risk Native American women.

**Third, VAWA is a cost-effective mechanism to assist a broad array of survivors:** Violence against women is expensive – just medical care, lost work productivity, and lost wages constitute over \$5.8 billion per year. San Diego economists report that it costs about \$2.5 million to bring a domestic violence murder case from arrest through incarceration. Severe head injuries can cost upwards of \$500,000 per year to treat and because they are often debilitating, taxpayers may assume the bill when insurance ends. It is estimated that just during its first six years, VAWA saved about \$14.8 billion in prevented net social costs.

**Fourth, VAWA helps interrupt the intergenerational cycle of family violence** by helping the non-violent parent flee and ensuring the children grow up in a stable, safe environment. Children growing up in violent homes may learn that it is okay to be abusive to get what you want and thus have a higher likelihood of later involvement in the courts.

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**Fifth, VAWA has been a fundamental part of this nation's public safety strategy** since 1994, engendering coordinated community responses to domestic and sexual violence. Finally, the concept of 'homeland security' must include protection from domestic partner terrorists as well as from strangers and political terrorists. Congress should immediately reauthorize and fully fund the Violence Against Women Act.