

Violence Against Women Reauthorization of 2021 Summary

- The landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994 ushered in transformative progress by calling for the protection of all Americans from violence and abuse and working to ensure survivors had access to essential services and to justice. Every time Congress has reauthorized VAWA, they have strengthened it to improve protections and access to safety and justice for all survivors. Since 1994, the rate of domestic violence has declined by 63 percent. However, the extent of domestic violence remains way too high. Experts estimate that one in three women in the U.S. still experience domestic violence.
- Like previous reauthorizations, H.R. 1620 makes some vital improvements to address gaps in current law, based on extensive consultation with victim service providers, law enforcement, and other experts. H.R. 1620 improves current law in several important respects, including the following:

The bill makes vital new investments in prevention:

- Increases the authorization for the Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE) to \$110 million a year from \$50 million a year and specifically includes prevention of sexual harassment to its authorized uses. Demand for programs funded by RPE has skyrocketed with the #MeToo movement and the national focus on campus sexual assault, and a corresponding increase is critically necessary to meet the need of communities.
- Increases funding for VAWA Consolidated Youth Grants. These grants fund prevention education programs that engage men and boys as allies and promote healthy relationships and that are key to reducing gender-based violence. Increased funding will provide programs with the resources they need to increase the depth and reach of these critical programs.

The bill improves services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking:

- Reauthorizes for fiscal years 2022 to 2026, key grants for programs providing services to the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Increases the authorization for the Sexual Assault Services Program to \$60 million to address increased demand and waiting lists for services.
- Authorizes funding for culturally specific organizations to provide victim services in Communities of Color.
- Increases the authorization for Legal Assistance for Victims
- Includes improvements in the grant program that provides services to the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who have disabilities or are Deaf.
- Includes improvements in the grant program that provides services for the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault who are older Americans.

The bill includes provisions to improve the criminal justice response to gender-based violence, in order to make our communities safer:

- Reauthorizes the critical STOP (Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors) grants and allows the grants to be used to develop law enforcement tools and protocols for preventing domestic violence homicides.
- Reauthorizes grants to improve the criminal justice response to domestic violence, focusing on implementation of offender accountability and homicide reduction.
- **The bill works to better protect Native American women:**
- Ensures non-Native perpetrators who commit sexual assault, stalking, child abuse or trafficking on tribal lands are held accountable.

- Improves the response to cases of missing and murdered women in tribal communities.
- Clarifies that tribal courts can hold domestic violence offenders who assault tribal police officers or other justice officials accountable.
- Creates a permanent authorization for DOJ's Tribal Access to National Crime Information Program.
- Addresses the unique barriers to safety for Alaska Native women.

The bill improves access to housing for survivors and victims:

- Strengthens the enforcement of housing rights for survivors and victims.
- Creates a Violence Against Women Director at HUD who is tasked with the work of enforcing housing rights for survivors and victims.
- Increases survivors' options to maintain housing or break their leases.
- Strengthens emergency transfer protections in federal housing programs for survivors and victims.
- Creates a Victim Relocation Voucher pool to assist survivors needing to flee their homes due to safety concerns.
- Improves the homeless system response to survivors.

The bill supports survivors who need assistance rebuilding financially:

- Increases the authorization for the National Resource Center on Workplace Responses, which assists the victims of domestic and sexual violence.
- Protects employees from being fired because they are survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence.
- Expressly includes sexual harassment as part of sexual violence addressed by the National Resource Center on Workplace Responses to ensure it can continue to provide tools, resources,

and training to private employers and federal agencies on preventing and responding to workplaces impacted by such violence and harassment.

- Provides that state unemployment compensation shall not be denied to an individual who voluntarily separates from employment if such separation is attributable to them being a victim of sexual or other harassment, or a survivor of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

The bill improves the health care system's response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking:

- Reauthorizes key grants to strengthen the health care system's response.
- Broadens the reach of these grants to develop services to address the safety, medical, and mental health needs of survivors, while maintaining the grants' local focus on providing funds to state domestic and sexual violence coalitions.
- Provides for the training of health care providers to better prevent, recognize, and respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking across the lifespan, particularly through HRSA programs such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program.

The bill supports Communities of Color, including by:

- Increasing access to grant programs for culturally specific organizations and ensuring culturally specific organizations are included in the development and implementation of service, education, training, and other grants.
- Establishing a Deputy Director of Culturally Specific Communities in the Office on Violence Against Women and substantially increasing authorized funding for culturally specific organizations.

- Ensuring meaningful involvement of culturally specific organizations in the Rape Prevention & Education (RPE) grant-making process.
- Requiring applicants for the National Resource Center on Workplace Responses to include in their applications a plan to enhance survivors' capacity to obtain and maintain employment with a focus on culturally specific organizations and organizations that serve populations who are marginalized in the workplace.
- Increasing funding to enhance culturally specific services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- In providing training for health care providers to better recognize and respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, requiring that the training includes prevention and cultural competence, is culturally relevant, addresses systemic racism and equity, and includes the impact of inter-generational violence.

The bill improves conditions for women in federal custody:

- Directs the Director of the Bureau of Prisons to establish an office to determine the placement of prisoners. The office would be required to place prisoners as close to their children as possible.
- Requires the Bureau of Prisons to hold parenting classes for prisoners who are primary caretaker parents.
- Directs the Bureau of Prisons, no later than 270 days after enactment, to establish a pilot program to permit women incarcerated in the Bureau of Prisons and the children born to such women during incarceration to reside together while the prisoner serves a term of imprisonment in a separate housing wing of the prison.

The bill protects the Office on Violence Against Women:

- Updates the name of the office in the Department of Justice charged with implementing VAWA from the “Violence Against Women Office” to the “Office on Violence Against Women.”
- Clarifies that the Office on Violence Against Women must not be subsumed under any other grant-making office within the Department of Justice.

Finally, the bill protects victims of dating violence from firearm homicide by closing some loopholes in current firearms laws in order to help prevent intimate partner and stalking homicides. Federal law already prohibits abusers who have been convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors and abusers who are subject to most final domestic violence protective orders from purchasing firearms. This bill closes some loopholes, as follows:

- Updates the definition of “intimate partner” to include dating partner and former dating partner, thereby closing a loophole that allowed adjudicated dating abusers to possess firearms.
- Prohibits persons convicted of stalking misdemeanors from possessing firearms.
- Expands the current law that already prohibits those subject to most domestic violence protective orders from possessing a firearm to also include those subject to “ex parte” protective orders (also called ‘emergency’ or ‘temporary’ protective orders), but not until the notice and an opportunity to be heard have been provided to the respondent.

A coalition of more than 200 organizations supports H.R. 1620:

- The coalition of more than 200 organizations organized on the VAWA issue – known as the National Task force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women – supports H.R. 1620. This coalition includes such groups as the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, National Network to End Domestic Violence, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, National

Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, Break the Cycle, Legal Momentum, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, National Organization for Women, MomsRising, Feminist Majority, YWCA USA, AAUW, Business and Professional Women's Foundation, National Partnership for Women and Families, National Women's Law Center, National Association of Hispanic Organizations, AFL-CIO, UAW, NAACP, Human Rights Campaign, National Council of Churches, and National Congress of American Indians.