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Formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund

**United States Senate
Judiciary Committee
July 13, 2011**

Judiciary Hearing on "The Violence Against Women Act: Building on Seventeen Years of Accomplishments"

Statement by Esta Soler, Founder and President, Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund:

On behalf of Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund, and a member of the National Task Force to End Domestic and Sexual Violence, I would like to thank the Committee for holding this hearing. For more than 30 years, our organization has worked to end violence against women and children. We would like to focus on a few program areas supported by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), including a few programs that were included in the most recent reauthorization of VAWA in 2005 that have only recently begun to be implemented.

Assisting Employers to Respond to Violence Against Women:

The National Resource Center On Workplace Responses To Assist Victims Of Domestic And Sexual Violence (Resource Center) was created and authorized pursuant to the Violence Against Women Act of 2005, and is funded by OVW at \$1 million per year for three years. The Resource Center initially was created by a partnership of six national organizations: Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund), Legal Momentum, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Resource Sharing Project of the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault, American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence, Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, and Victim Rights Law Center.

The Resource Center was formed in 2009 to address an emerging issue with significant economic, safety and human consequences - the intersection of intimate partner violence and workplace. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence equals \$727.8 million.¹ Several recent news stories have highlighted the ways in which workers are vulnerable to sexual assault in the workplace, and the difference that their employers' support can make in addressing these crimes. Nevertheless, a Bureau of Labor Statistics study found that only 13% of workplaces in the U.S. have a policy specifically addressing domestic or sexual violence in the workplace.²

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. (2003). *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta, GA

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006). *Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, 2005*. Washington, D.C.

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The Resource Center helps employers and unions to assist victims, ensure the safety and productivity of their workplace, and minimize exposure to potential liability by providing information, resources, interactive tools, and technical assistance. Since its inception in October 2009, the partners have created and populated website to form a hub for research and resource materials and technical assistance requests for the Resource Center. The Resource Center's website, workplacerespond.org, was launched by the White House in October 2010. It has information and interactive tools that have never before been available, including a quiz to test knowledge about domestic and sexual violence, fact sheets, frequently asked questions with answers, a protection order guide, safety and security information, an interactive training module, and a customizable and downloadable workplace policy.

Over 9,300 people have taken the quiz and over 1,800 people have used the customizable workplace policy tool. Additionally, the partners (upon the request of OVW), drafted a model policy for the federal government for addressing the workplace effects of domestic and sexual violence and stalking. That policy was submitted to the Department of Justice for review in October 2010. In the last 18 months, the Resource Center has conducted seven workshops across the country for several hundred domestic and international businesses, advocates and service providers, law enforcement, judges and court personnel, health care providers, and unions on how to recognize, prevent and address the workplace effects of violence. Local domestic and sexual violence services programs can use the virtual resource center as a basis for partnering with local employers in workplace violence response and prevention activities.

We firmly believe that the best way to continue progress in dealing with the issue is for employers, unions and service providers to work together to address both prevention and response. Reauthorizing and continuing to fund the Resource Center will allow us to expand our reach to assist more types of workplaces (for instance, universities, retail stores, and small businesses), help them build relationships with local service providers, and provide training materials and programs on this issue. Employers will be better able to prevent and respond effectively to domestic and sexual violence, and increase safety, productivity and morale while decreasing turnover, retraining and other costs.

Youth and Prevention

In VAWA 2005, the Children Exposed to Violence and the Engaging Men and Youth program were created. We believe that working with men and youth to be leaders in changing attitudes about the acceptability of domestic and sexual violence and providing early intervention services to children who have witnessed violence are two of the most important strategies for breaking the often intergenerational cycle of violence. Importantly, evidence-based programs to accomplish these goals exist along with research on the impacts of leaving early exposure to violence and abuse unaddressed.

A recent nationwide study of children's exposure to violence found that each year more than 15 million children in the United States are exposed to violence in their homes. In fact, more than sixty percent of the children surveyed for this study were exposed to violence within the past year, either as victims or as witnesses, and by the time children are 17, one-third will have witnessed domestic violence.

Recent research shows that children react in different ways to exposure to violence. Some children show remarkable resilience; these children have protective forces in their lives—including closeness with a nonviolent, capable parent—that help mitigate the effects of exposure to violence. Other children do not fare as well. The effects on children of exposure to violence can include mental health problems, suicide, school failure, and later perpetration or victimization by this population as teens and adults. Early identification of exposure to violence and interventions that strengthen protective forces in children's lives are both critical to reducing these negative effects of violence.

Programs that provide services to both the child and the nonviolent parent get better outcomes than programs that serve only the child or parent. VAWA 2005 included the Children Exposed to Violence program to fund intervention services for children who witnessed this violence and to create partnerships with domestic violence programs and other community-based supports that can help mothers and children be safe together, the kinds of interventions deemed most effective.

The second critical strategy identified is working with men and boys, not as perpetrators, but as agents of social change. Programs that engage male leaders and older youth to influence younger men and boys have been documented to reduce harmful attitudes and behaviors. The last reauthorization of VAWA in 2005 recognized this and created a new program to help incentivize this work and fund efforts to organize and educate men about their role and responsibility in ending violence. The Engaging Men in Preventing Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Grant Program has now been funded for the last three years at \$2.5 million to \$3 million annually, however the on the ground work is only beginning. We strongly encourage the committee to maintain this program and clarify that it is meant to support work with men as influencers of youth and should include both education and awareness campaigns targeting men as leaders and role models as well as programs that support community-based teaching and organizing.

Judicial Training

Supported by technical assistance funding, the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence (NJIDV) is a dynamic partnership among Futures Without Violence, the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The NJIDV provides highly interactive, skills-based domestic violence workshops for judges and judicial officers in state and tribal courts nationwide.

Studies show that domestic violence cases represent a substantial and increasing proportion of all cases processed by state civil and criminal courts; in some states domestic relations cases are the fastest increasing segment of state civil court caseloads. State criminal, family and juvenile courts, as well as tribal courts, are on the front line in dealing with these increased numbers of domestic violence in both civil and criminal proceedings. The surging caseload has resulted in increased demand for community resources, expanding and constantly changing legislation, and a demand for increased collaboration to deal with the needs of victims, perpetrators, and their children, especially in areas with new and growing numbers of immigrant and/or ethnic minority populations. Keeping judicial officers up to date with emerging legal and social science research and law in this area is a critical issue in the face of the complex demands of domestic violence cases. Judges and court personnel also need opportunities to practice skills and decision making with their peers as they confront new and difficult courtroom situations and issues presented by domestic violence cases.

Over the past 13 years, the NJIDV has developed a continuum of judicial education to incorporate and address these issues. The portfolio of education programs currently includes: the Enhancing Judicial Skills (EJS) in Domestic Violence Cases Workshop, conducted 39 times, providing training for 2,100 state and tribal court judges; the Continuing Judicial Skills (CJS) in Domestic Violence Cases Program, conducted eight times, providing training for 333 state and tribal court judges; six Judicial Education Roundtables; and five Faculty Development and Technical Assistance programs for state and regional adaptation and replication of NJIDV programs. Most recently, the NJIDV developed a four-day Enhancing Judicial Skills in Elder Abuse Cases Workshop, which provides a hands-on, highly interactive workshop that will help new and experienced state court judges and judicial officers to improve their skills and ability to respond to cases involving violence against the elderly. This workshop has been held on five occasions and attended by 175 judges.

We know progress has been made as a result of the trainings, but we also know that there are still hundreds of courts across the country that are overburdened and seek guidance in responding sensitively and appropriately to cases involving domestic violence before them, and survivors who seek justice and safety.

We strongly encourage the committee to maintain funding for this program so that we can continue to provide this crucial support to state and tribal court systems that are already overburdened and under-resourced.

Improving Delivery of Victim Services

For the past three years, the Institute for Leadership in Education Development (I-LED), an Office on Violence Against Women-funded program through technical assistance programming, has provided OVW grantees with educational workshops to enhance the training needs of their programs so that they can effectively deliver services to survivors.

In total the I-LED program has trained over 250 OVW grantees representing over 30 states since it began in May 2009. We believe the technical assistance and training provided by I-LED is critical to allowing OVW grantees to use grant funds efficiently and enhances the desperately-needed services they are able to provide in their communities, and strongly urge the committee to continue to provide funding for this program.

Future VAWA Needs

At a recent field hearing in June held in Providence, Rhode Island of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, the witnesses testified about the need to prioritize teen dating violence prevention in the next VAWA reauthorization.

Similar to the impact of children exposed to violence, the impact of teen dating violence is widespread and the risk factors start early. Nearly one-third of youth will experience dating violence, and the negative health effects include higher rates of using drugs, engaging in unhealthy diet behaviors, risky sexual behaviors, and attempting or considering suicide.

A working group of advocates from around the country and co-chaired by Futures Without Violence and Break the Cycle have come together with a common agenda for the reauthorization of VAWA. We support maintaining the programs that have been funded but include an increased focus on prevention, particularly the prevention of dating violence, one of the identified shortfalls of the previous VAWA.

As you know, VAWA currently includes a few programs that address services for teen dating violence as well as the prevention of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Three of these programs (Services for Youth Victims, Training for Schools, and Access to Justice for Youth) focus on providing services to teen victims, working with schools to help students who are victims and creating community-based responses that support advocacy and a more coordinated response to the needs of teens and youth. While all of these programs were created in the last VAWA reauthorization approved by Congress in 2005, unfortunately, we do not have much information to share on the results of the programs. Only in the last year has the Department of Justice actually released the funds and issued grants to begin implementing the work. We look forward to being able to document the work and measuring its effectiveness moving forward.

Specifically, we ask that the VAWA reauthorization bill continue to support the existing prevention programs (Children Exposed to Violence and Engaging Men and Youth) and increase the focus on teen dating violence by providing grants through the Office on Violence Against Women in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services to local community partnerships to establish and operate programs targeting youth between the ages of 10 and 19. The teen dating violence prevention programming would:

- Create age and developmentally appropriate education programs targeting young people ages 10-19;
- Include education and mobilization for parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, faith-leaders and other "influencers" as role models and educators for young people;
- Work with middle schools, where little education is currently being provided, in addition to high schools, to integrate healthy relationship education and dating violence prevention programming;

- Link schools and youth-serving organizations with domestic and sexual violence agencies to ensure services are available if a young person is already being victimized.

Futures Without Violence looks forward to being a partner with the Committee in continuing to support these effective VAWA initiatives and increase the focus on prevention of violence and abuse, particularly among teens and children exposed to violence.