



Violence Against Women Act of 2011 (Title IV)

Saving Money and Reducing Tragedies through Prevention Act of 2011 or SMART Prevention Act (S. 1920/H.R. 3515)

Problem

- The recent Penn State case and subsequent spike in calls to sexual assault hotlines have shined a spotlight on the issue of childhood sexual violence.
- The recent Department of Justice study, National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, found 1 in 16 children were victimized sexually in the past year, and that 15.5 million children live in two-parent homes where adult partner violence occurred in the previous year.
- Children who are exposed to even one type of violence are at far greater risk of experiencing other types of violence, including teen dating violence and then domestic violence.
- As part of the cycle of violence, approximately one in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of *physical, emotional or verbal* abuse from a dating partner – a figure that far exceeds victimization rates for other types of violence affecting youth.

Background

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2005 included a program entitled *Children Exposed to Violence and Abuse*. The focus of the program is to provide services for children exposed to sexual assault and violence in the home, including direct counseling or advocacy. The second component of the program is training for educational, after-school, and childcare personnel on how to safely and confidentially identify children exposed to this type of violence and properly refer them to services and violence prevention programs. VAWA 2005 also included a program to engage men as leaders and role models in changing attitudes and behaviors around these issues. Together, these programs have been funded at \$6 million, a little more than 1% of the total DOJ VAWA programs.

SMART Prevention Act of 2011

As Congress considers reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) have introduced stand-alone bills to bring greater attention to the issues of children's exposure to violence and efforts to prevent it and help younger victims. The proposed legislation consolidates the existing VAWA prevention programs that have been funded, including Children Exposed to Violence and Abuse, to create more community-based responses and improve coordination among existing programs that help children and youth. Mirroring the language included in S. 1925, the recent Leahy/Crapo Violence Against Women Act of 2011 (Section 402), the bill is an important step forward in proactively trying to assist children and youth exposed to violence.

Specifically, it consolidates two prevention programs: *Services for Children Exposed to Violence and Abuse* and *Engaging Men and Youth* into one program and within the comprehensive program it includes a teen dating violence prevention focus. The increased focus on the prevention of dating violence, one of the identified shortfalls of the previous approach, recognizes the importance of targeting this age group as a critical time when young people are forming attitudes and behaviors around the acceptability of violence and abuse. It also supports education and skills training to youth and those who influence young people.

The teen dating violence prevention focus would:

- Create age and developmentally appropriate education programs targeting young people ages 11-19, with a focus on ages 11-14;
- 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.

As recent news reports have shown, children in the United States are much more likely to experience violence or witness some type of violence than is publicly recognized, which may include physical and sexual abuse or domestic and community violence. While we are strong supporters of the entire VAWA-authorized criminal justice and service programs, we need to increase our investment in prevention programs to curtail future adult and adolescent victimization. This small investment will save tax dollars over time by helping to break the intergenerational cycle of violence. Most importantly, it will save families the devastation of seeing a child beaten, raped, or killed. There are many promising prevention programs in the field, but state budget cuts and the overwhelming need for service dollars during this difficult economic time has caused many of these prevention efforts to stall or to be eliminated.

For additional information, please contact Sally Schaeffer with Futures Without Violence, formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund, at sschaeffer@futureswithoutviolence.org or 202-595-7384. To cosponsor the VAWA of 2011, please contact Anya McMurray with Senator Leahy at 202-224-7703. To cosponsor the stand-alone issue bills, please contact Justin Florence with Senator Whitehouse at (202) 224-9508 or Jamila Thompson with Rep. Lewis at 202-225-3801.