



**THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VOLUNTEER
ATTORNEY NETWORK ACT
ABA SUPPORTS S. 1515, H.R. 6088**

Domestic violence is a well-documented epidemic in America. Nearly one in three women will be a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime. Without a doubt, it permeates every aspect of victims' lives and damages their physical, mental and emotional health as well as their participation in education systems and the workforce.

Experts agree a key to ending domestic violence is meaningful access to the justice system. Often stopping the violence and accessing safety hinges on a victim's ability to obtain effective protection orders, initiate separation proceedings or design safe child custody. To address the critical need of victims of domestic violence to obtain lawyers to assist in this process, Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) have introduced S. 1515, the *National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act*. Reps. John Conyers (D-MI) and Ted Poe (R-TX) have introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 6088. This bipartisan legislation harnesses the skills, enthusiasm and dedication of lawyers across the country to bring them into the justice system to represent domestic violence victims on a voluntary basis.

The ABA urges you to support S. 1515 and H.R. 6088, the *National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act* because:

- **It addresses the dire need to increase legal services for victims of domestic violence by providing a tailored solution that includes identifying the existing gaps in representation.** The legislation requires a National Institute of Justice study on the scope and quality of legal services available to victims of domestic violence across the country that will be issued to Congress within a year.
- **It funds a clearinghouse for recruitment and training with the creation of the National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network.** The American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence would manage the Network in partnership with other national domestic violence and pro bono organizations with close oversight by the Office on Violence Against Women. The non-profit program will solicit volunteer lawyers and then create and maintain an electronic network of existing and new resources. It will also provide appropriate mentoring, training and technical assistance to volunteer lawyers.
- **It implements a pilot program that matches volunteer attorneys with victims in five states and then establishes a national referral program in two years.** This referral program would utilize statewide coordinators in each of the states to match domestic violence victims with providers of legal services. Current legal services only serve approximately 170,000 low-income domestic violence victims each year leaving the majority of the estimated 1 million victims of domestic violence without legal assistance. The referral program would bring tremendous new resources to help connect unrepresented victims with volunteer lawyers.
- **It provides accountability by establishing a National Domestic Violence Legal Advisory Task Force to provide on-going guidance.** This cross-section of experts will be a resource to ensure that the program is effectively connecting victims with the lawyers they are seeking to assist with the services necessary to become safe.
- **It builds upon the success of the Violence Against Women Act and enhances coordination between the proven models of providing legal assistance to victims.** Full funding for front line attorneys through the Legal Services Corporation and the Civil Legal Assistance for Victims program will be complemented by the establishment of a coordinated network of volunteer attorneys that acting together should be better equipped to meet the demand for legal services.