November 30, 2011

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy  The Honorable Michael D. Crapo  
437 Russell Senate Office Building  239 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510  

Re:  Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act

Dear Senators Leahy and Crapo:

On behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA) and its nearly 400,000 members, I commend you for your impending introduction of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization bill. The ABA strongly supports your effort to continue proven effective programs that support victims of domestic, sexual, stalking and dating violence and their families.

The ABA has long taken a leadership role in addressing domestic, sexual and stalking violence and recognizes the important role of the legal profession in addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking crimes. Since 1994, the ABA’s Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence (formerly the Commission on Domestic Violence) has worked to increase access to justice for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking by mobilizing the legal profession. The Commission has provided critically necessary training in litigation skills and strategies for domestic and sexual violence attorneys litigating these complex and complicated matters in trial courts across the country with limited resources. This training helps increase the ability of courts across the country to redress criminal activity and support victims of crime. The ABA believes that reauthorization of VAWA is essential to maintaining victim services and to bringing victims and their families to safety.

For over 17 years, VAWA has provided life-saving assistance to hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children who are victims of crime. While VAWA initially focused on improving the criminal justice response to domestic and sexual violence, it has evolved through the last two reauthorizations to address more effectively the needs of victims of multiple crimes, including dating violence and stalking. It funds critical services for sexual assault victims, including men and boys, teens and youth, and enhanced prevention programs. The last reauthorization also broadened core services by expanding eligible entities to culturally specific communities. VAWA programs are essential, core components of the justice system.
The economic crisis has had a disproportionate and devastating effect on victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking crimes. These victims rely on victim service programs to escape violence and rebuild their lives, but these programs throughout the country are unable to meet the increasing demand. We fully understand the pressures placed by the economic climate on lawmakers to cut federal programs, but in this instance failing to reauthorize VAWA would be more than short-sighted. We thus commend your dedication to renewing and extending VAWA’s efficient programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in saving lives, money, and jobs.

We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to ensure prompt passage of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Susman