January 31, 2012

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
437 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

We understand that the Committee may soon consider S. 1925, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011. I write on behalf of the American Bar Association to express our strong support for S. 1925 and to urge its prompt approval by the Judiciary Committee.

The Violence Against Women Act was an effective response by Congress in 1994 to the devastating effects of domestic and sexual violence. The act has evolved from a small criminal justice initiative to a multidisciplinary federal effort to address the needs of women, men and children threatened by domestic and sexual violence. Policies and programs supported and inspired by the act have been credited with providing lifesaving assistance to hundreds of thousands of victims. Incentives in the act also have encouraged the states to address the problem more assertively.

Congress reauthorized VAWA in 2000 and again in 2005. Now the American Bar Association and other groups are urging Congress once more to reauthorize the act. VAWA has been the single most effective federal effort to respond to the epidemic of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking in this country. The act has ensured that legal and social services are available to survivors, and that law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, attorneys and advocates are well-trained and equipped with cutting-edge resources to effectively address these crimes in their own communities.

In January of this year, 53 Attorneys General signed a joint letter to Congress expressing their support for VAWA and urging Congress to reauthorize this critical piece of legislation. Hundreds of local programs, faith groups, state coalitions and others have signed similar letters, urging swift reauthorization and supporting the current Senate bill.
Recent studies support arguments for reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. According to a U.S. Justice Department report, for instance, the number of women killed by intimate partners decreased by 35 percent between 1993 (the year before the act’s passage) and 2008, and nonfatal violent acts against women by intimate partners decreased by 53 percent. During the same period, the number of men killed by intimate partners decreased by 46 percent, and the number of nonfatal violent acts against men by intimate partners dropped by 54 percent. Other studies indicate that incidents of domestic and sexual violence tend to go down when victims have legal representation and when they obtain protection orders.

Nevertheless, the United States still has a long way to go. According to a CDC study released in December, nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men in the United States have been raped at some time in their lives. One in 6 women and 1 in 19 men have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetime in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed. And about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.

VAWA is a critical tool in the arsenal to address domestic and sexual violence. One study found that in 86% of cases where a victim received a protection order, the abuse stopped or was greatly reduced. Another found that half of victims who obtained a protection order experienced no violations of the order in the following 6 months. For those victims who did experience violations, every type of violence and abuse was reduced significantly during the 6 month follow-up period. A 2010 study demonstrated that an increase in the availability of legal services is associated with a decrease in intimate partner homicide.

VAWA has become an integral part of our public safety strategy that has empirical support for its effectiveness. The good work being done by thousands of local providers and public servants cannot continue without its reauthorization. We strongly urge the Members of the Judiciary Committee to favorably report S. 1925 so that it may soon be considered by the full Senate.

Sincerely,

Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III

Enclosure

cc: Members of the Committee
    Sen. Michael D. Crapo
January 11, 2012

Dear Members of Congress,

Since its passage in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”) has shined a bright light on domestic violence, bringing the issue out of the shadows and into the forefront of our efforts to protect women and families. VAWA transformed the response to domestic violence at the local, state and federal level. Its successes have been dramatic, with the annual incidence of domestic violence falling by more than 50 percent\(^1\).

Even though the advancements made since in 1994 have been significant, a tremendous amount of work remains and we believe it is critical that the Congress reauthorize VAWA. Every day in this country, abusive husbands or partners kill three women, and for every victim killed, there are nine more who narrowly escape that fate\(^2\). We see this realized in our home states every day. Earlier this year in Delaware, three children – ages 12, 2 ½ and 1 ½ – watched their mother be beaten to death by her ex-boyfriend on a sidewalk. In Maine last summer, an abusive husband subject to a protective order murdered his wife and two young children before taking his own life.

Reauthorizing VAWA will send a clear message that this country does not tolerate violence against women and show Congress’ commitment to reducing domestic violence, protecting women from sexual assault and securing justice for victims.

VAWA reauthorization will continue critical support for victim services and target three key areas where data shows we must focus our efforts in order to have the greatest impact:

- **Domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault are most prevalent among young women aged 16-24, with studies showing that youth attitudes are still largely tolerant of violence, and that women abused in adolescence are more likely to be abused again as adults.** VAWA reauthorization will help us break that cycle by consolidating and strengthening programs aimed at both prevention and intervention, with a particular emphasis on more effectively engaging men and local community-based resources in the process.

- **A woman who has been sexually assaulted can be subjected to further distress when the healthcare, law enforcement, and legal response to her attack is not coordinated and productive.** Whether it is a first responder without

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\(^2\) Conversation between Lynn Rosenthal and with Jackie Campbell, May 2010.
adequate training, a rape kit that goes unprocessed for lack of funding, or a phone call between a crisis counselor and a prosecutor that never takes place, sexual assault victims deserve better. We must develop and implement best practices, training, and communication tools across disciplines in order to effectively prosecute and punish perpetrators, as well as help victims heal and rebuild their lives.

- There is a growing consensus among practitioners and researchers that domestic violence homicides are predictable and, therefore, often preventable. We can save the lives of untold numbers of potential homicide victims with better training for advocates, law enforcement, and others who interact with victims to recognize the warning signs and react meaningfully.

The fight to protect women from violence is one that never ends. It is not a year-to-year issue, which is why we think it is critical that Congress reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. We know a great deal more about domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking than we did 17 years ago. Reauthorizing VAWA will allow us to build on those lessons and continue to make progress and save lives.

VAWA was last reauthorized in 2006 and time is of the essence for reauthorization of this important law. We urge Congress to take on this critical mission and reauthorize VAWA.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. “Beau” Biden III  
Delaware Attorney General

William J. Schneider  
Maine Attorney General

Tom Horne  
Arizona Attorney General

Kamala Harris  
California Attorney General

Pam Bondi  
Florida Attorney General
Sam Olens  
Georgia Attorney General

Lisa Madigan  
Illinois Attorney General

Tom Miller  
Iowa Attorney General

Douglas F. Gansler  
Maryland Attorney General

Bill Schuette  
Michigan Attorney General

Jim Hood  
Mississippi Attorney General

Steve Bullock  
Montana Attorney General

Catherine Cortez Masto  
Nevada Attorney General

Lee Savin  
New Hampshire Attorney General

Jeffrey Chiesa  
New Jersey Attorney General

Lenny Rapadas  
Guam Attorney General

Lawrence Wasden  
Idaho Attorney General

Greg Zoeller  
Indiana Attorney General

Derek Schmidt  
Kansas Attorney General

James “Buddy” Caldwell  
Louisiana Attorney General

Martha Coakley  
Massachusetts Attorney General

Lori Swanson  
Minnesota Attorney General

Chris Koster  
Missouri Attorney General

Jon Bruning  
Nebraska Attorney General

Michael Delaney  
New Hampshire Attorney General

Gary King  
New Mexico Attorney General