February 6, 2013

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the American Bar Association, with nearly 400,000 members across the country, I write to express our strong support for S. 47, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, sponsored by Senators Leahy and Crapo. We urge you to support passage of S. 47 and vote against any amendments that would weaken this important legislation.

The ABA has long supported efforts to address domestic, sexual and stalking violence, and we recognize that the legal profession fulfills an important role in addressing these crimes. Since 1994, the ABA’s Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence has also worked to increase access to justice for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking by mobilizing the legal profession. In recent years, the ABA has adopted policies that specifically address Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization, including some of the more challenging issues that ultimately proved to be barriers to reauthorization during the last Congress:

- February 2010: urging reauthorization and highlighting the need for legislation that “provides services, protection, and justice for underserved and vulnerable victims of violence, including children and youth who are victims or are witnesses to family violence, and victims who are disabled, elderly, immigrant, trafficked, LGBT and/or Indian.”
- August 2012: urging Congress “to strengthen tribal jurisdiction to address crimes of gender-based violence on tribal lands that are committed by non-Indian perpetrators.”

The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 is a bipartisan measure that was crafted carefully to reflect discussions with more than 2,000 advocates and experts from across the country. It is substantially similar to S. 1925 from the 112th Congress, which passed this body by a vote of 68-31. And it eliminates the procedural barrier that prevented S. 1925 from consideration by the House of Representatives.

Reauthorization of VAWA is critical. It provides Congress with the opportunity to amend VAWA so that it can combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence and stalking more effectively. With each authorization, VAWA is improved, and S. 47
continues this tradition. In particular, this legislation ensures that survivors of sexual assault have access to services; improves the campus response to violence; provides access to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survivors who frequently are excluded from services; and ensures that survivors in Indian country and the United States Territories have access to justice.

VAWA has become an integral part of our public safety strategy that has empirical support for its effectiveness. We urge you to vote in favor of S. 47.

Sincerely,

Laurel G. Bellows