Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization

Position

The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) calls upon the Congress to act now to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA was last reauthorized in 2013. Congressional action on this critical reauthorization is long overdue.

Forensic nurses are on the front lines of care for patients who have experienced intimate partner violence and sexual assault. In this role, forensic nurses see first-hand the needs of the patients they serve, as well as the challenges within the health care system and the programs that exist under VAWA.

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has impacted all parts of our society. While social distancing addresses viral issues on the public health spectrum, on the other end are victims of sexual assault and domestic violence forced to shelter with abusers while isolated from support and resources. The economic impact of the pandemic has only made victims more vulnerable by affecting income, financial security, and worsening the stressors that can increase domestic violence.

Background

Since its enactment, VAWA programs, administered by the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS), have dramatically improved federal, tribal, state, and local responses to these crimes.

Through the original bill, which passed in 1994, VAWA created the first U.S. federal legislation acknowledging domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes and provided federal resources to encourage community-coordinated responses to combating violence. Each VAWA reauthorization builds on existing protections and programs to better meet the needs of survivors.

While VAWA reauthorization was passed in the House of Representative in 2019, the Senate failed to act during the 116th Congress.

VAWA funds make it possible for grantees to recruit and employ forensic nurses in their community. It also helps fund access to the critical services forensic nurses provide including forensic examinations and processing of rape kits in the event of an assault.

Please contact IAFN’s Federal Representative, Patrick Cooney, at Patrick@federalgrp.com or (202) 413-2629 (m) with any questions you might have regarding this issue.