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The Leahy Letter

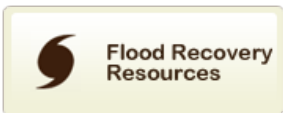
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Leahy, Crapo Reintroduce Bipartisan Bill To Reauthorize The Landmark Violence Against Women Act

... SJC Chairman Leahy Calls For Immediate Floor Action This Congress

January 22, 2013

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) reintroduced the bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act Tuesday—the first day that bills can be introduced in the Senate in the new 113th Congress— and called for the Senate to take up the measure without delay.

The bill, which reauthorizes the landmark Violence Against Women Act law that was enacted more than 20 years ago, strengthens and improves existing programs that assist victims and survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The measure closely mirrors the bipartisan legislation approved by the Senate last year, and again is coauthored by Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho).

"This life-saving legislation should be a top priority of the new 113th Congress," Leahy said of the bill, which won the support of 68 Senators include 15 Republicans and all the women Senators last year. "It is our hope that the Senate will act quickly to pass this strong, bipartisan bill to help all victims of domestic and sexual violence."

"The Violence Against Women Act has helped countless victims of domestic and relationship violence for nearly twenty years," Crapo said. "The path to reauthorization in the 113th Congress begins with reintroduction, and I look forward to working with Senator Leahy and my colleagues on compromise language that can garner the necessary support in both the Senate and House to pass this critical legislation."

The Leahy-Crapo VAWA bill seeks to protect all victims including those victims who are students, racial minorities, tribal members, immigrants and members of the LGBT community. The bill includes almost all of last year's bipartisan measure, including campus safety provisions and important all-state minimum funding formulas for key grant programs to ensure that small, rural states like Vermont have access to the victim services grants authorized under VAWA. Added to this year's measure is the SAFER Act, a bill also approved by the Senate last year that provides for audits of untested rape kits. The improved version now also provides law enforcement the tools they need to help reduce the backlog of rape kits throughout the country.

To better ensure passage of the Senate VAWA bill, this year's measure does not include the modest increase in the number of U visas available to immigrant victims. House Republicans objected to taking up the Senate-passed measure last year based on technical grounds of the U visa provision, and by setting it aside Leahy said the new VAWA bill should have a stronger chance of passing both chambers this year. Leahy intends to work to ensure that the provision passes as part of comprehensive immigration reform instead.

"In the interest of making quick and decisive progress, we introduce the bill today without that provision in order to remove any excuse for House inaction," Leahy said. "We have retained other important improvements for immigrant victims in the bill we introduce today as part of our commitment to ensuring that all victims are protected."

The Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized in 2000 and again in 2005, each time with bipartisan support. The law expired in September 2011. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act will provide a five year authorization for VAWA programs,

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and reduce authorized funding levels by more than \$135 million, or 17 percent, from the law's 2005 authorization.

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Text of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013

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**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On the Introduction of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013
January 22, 2013**

On the first day for bill introductions this year I once again join with Senator Crapo and a distinguished, bipartisan group of Senators to introduce the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013. This life-saving legislation should be a top priority of the new 113th Congress. It is our hope that the Senate will act quickly to pass this strong, bipartisan bill to help all victims of domestic and sexual violence.

The Senate acted just nine months ago to approve the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012 with 68 bipartisan votes. Despite our best efforts, the House did not join in our bipartisan efforts and enact that bill into law.

By now, the litany of VAWA's successes is familiar, but important. Since this historic legislation first passed in 1994, states have strengthened criminal rape statutes, and every state has made stalking a crime. The annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50 percent. We have helped to provide victims with critical services like housing and legal protection. Those are just a few highlights. We need to remember that behind those numbers are thousands of lives made immeasurably better.

Despite VAWA's success, there is a pressing need to update and strengthen its protections. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that one in four women has been the victim of severe physical domestic violence and one in five women has been raped in her lifetime. These numbers are almost too awful to contemplate.

Real life cases remind us that this reauthorization is long overdue. Last month, I read in the *Burlington Free Press* the story of Carmen Tarleton, a woman from Thetford, Vermont. Five years ago, Carmen's estranged husband broke into her home, beat her with a baseball bat, and poured industrial-strength lye on her, severely burning a great deal of her body and nearly blinding her. Her doctors said that she had suffered "the most horrific injury a human being could suffer." Today, she is nearly blind, disfigured, and continues to experience pain from her injuries. Despite this, Carmen is courageously sharing her story.

Stories like this one remind us that every day that we do not pass legislation that will help to prevent horrific violence and assist victims, more people are suffering. Late last year while Congress failed to act on our bipartisan bill, we saw tragic domestic violence-related murder-suicides in Missouri and Colorado. We also learned of harrowing new accounts of sexual assaults on college campuses. These are just more examples of the kind of tragedies that unfold every day across the country.

The Leahy-Crapo bill would support the use of techniques proven to help identify high-risk cases and prevent domestic violence homicides. It would increase VAWA's focus on sexual assault and push colleges to strengthen their efforts to protect students from domestic and sexual violence.

This reauthorization will allow us to make real progress in addressing the horrifying epidemic of domestic violence in tribal communities, where one recent study found that almost three in five native women have been assaulted by their spouses or intimate partners. It will allow services to get to those in the LGBT community who have had trouble accessing services in the past.

Every VAWA reauthorization Congress has passed has taken steps to help immigrant victims of violence, who are often particularly vulnerable. Last year's bill included a

modest increase in the number of U visas available to immigrant victims who help law enforcement, which is good for victims and for law enforcement. Unfortunately, that provision led to a technical objection from House Republican leaders. In the interest of making quick and decisive progress, we introduce the bill today without that provision in order to remove any excuse for House inaction. We have retained other important improvements for immigrant victims in the bill we introduce today as part of our commitment to ensuring that all victims are protected.

I still believe strongly in the U visa increase that was in last year's Leahy-Crapo bill. I authored that provision after hearing from law enforcement and the experts in the field. I think it is needed to encourage assistance to law enforcement and to protect immigrant women and I remain committed to enacting it and ensuring that the needed U visa increase is adopted. I intend to work to include it in comprehensive immigration reform legislation that we should consider early in this Congress. It will be part of our immigration reform effort.

We have included, as well, in this year's bill the specific provisions of the SAFER bill that I worked out with Senator Cornyn and Senator Grassley last year and that then passed the Senate unanimously late in the session. I hope that Senators who opposed VAWA last year while supporting those provisions will now join with us in our effort to enact VAWA reauthorization that includes those provisions, as well.

All of the provisions in our bill were developed with the help of victims and with those who assist them every day. They are common sense measures that will help real people. It is past time for Congress to move beyond partisan politics in order to provide help to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

We can make these concrete and important changes in the law that will prevent terrible violence and provide more help to victims. There is no excuse for delay. I hope all Senators will join me in quickly moving this bill through the Senate and that the House will quickly work with us to get a strong VAWA bill to the President.

I thank Senator Crapo, the lead Senate Republican cosponsor of our bill and Senators Murkowski, Mikulski, Ayotte, Collins, Coons, Durbin, Bennet, Klobuchar, Shaheen, and McCaskill, who join us as original cosponsors and have all been strong supporters of VAWA. I look forward to many others joining us to move forward on this vital legislation. I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the Record.

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