

Break the Cycle
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
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April 28, 2006

The Violence Against Women Act 2005 (P.L. 109-162), recently unanimously reauthorized by the U.S. Congress, provides funding for proven effective programs and creates new programs to fill gaps in the original legislation. Because the President's budget was completed before VAWA 2005 was passed and signed into law on January 5, 2006, all of the new programs and many of the reauthorized programs which were given an increase in funding are not fully funded in the President's budget.

Break the Cycle is a national non-profit with a mission to engage, educate, and empower youth to build lives and communities free from domestic and dating violence. Founded in 1996 in Los Angeles, California, Break the Cycle has worked to raise awareness among youth and youth service providers about domestic and dating violence. Break the Cycle provides law-based preventative education and free legal services to youth ages 12 to 24. Break the Cycle opened its Washington, DC office in 2004, and has worked with both youth and policy makers to ensure that youth have the necessary resources available to develop healthy relationships and build communities free from violence. Break the Cycle is the only organization of its kind in the country.

Break the Cycle respectfully requests full funding for all VAWA 2005 programs in the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget. Additionally, because of the mission of our organization; to engage, educate and empower youth to end domestic and dating violence, we are especially concerned with the programs directly affecting youth and will address the vital need to fully fund these programs in this testimony.

Youth and Domestic and Dating Violence

“At the age of thirteen, I began dating my first boyfriend. It was a time in my life when I was plagued by all the typical insecurities of entering adolescence, being acutely self-conscious and wanting simply to feel connected to the world...It was the closeness of our relationship that allowed me to overlook the times when he would punch me and push me around, the threats to commit suicide if I ever left him, the emotional strain that I felt being with him...As more and more time passes, I am learning again to trust myself, to trust others, and to take care of myself. It is at these points in life when I recognize the need for more young girls to be able to have the type of support that I feel I received too late in life...girls need to be taught to trust, to be able to confront their abuse, to be able to learn to live without it.” Break the Cycle supporter

The youth of this country are facing a grave situation that is largely ignored by the people who are responsible for helping them grow into healthy adults. Sexual and dating violence occur among youth at rates disproportionate to the rest of the nation; teens and young women, aged 16 to 24, experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence, almost three times the average for

women as a whole.ⁱ Additionally, the age at which a female is at greatest risk for rape or sexual assault is 14,ⁱⁱ and in one study, one quarter of teen girls who have been in a romantic relationship admitted that they had been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse when they did not want to.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, domestic violence resources are usually focused on adult women or young children who are victims of abuse.

For youth, who face a unique set of circumstances when dealing with abuse, these resources do not meet their needs. They are in a stage of their lives where they are just learning to navigate the adult world, developing positive and healthy relationships is essential to their success as adults. Victims of teen dating violence are more likely to: use alcohol, tobacco, and cocaine; drive after drinking; engage in unhealthy weight control behaviors; commit sexually risky behaviors including first intercourse before age 15, multiple partnering, and lack of condom use; become pregnant; and commit suicide.^{iv} Additionally, youth that witness domestic or dating violence also have higher probabilities of truancy, poor school performance, and trouble concentrating.^v These behaviors limit youths' ability to become healthy adults. Young people must be educated and empowered to end the violence in their lives. VAWA 2005 can help stop this cycle of violence where it starts. Congress has taken the first step in recognizing and correcting this problem by unanimously passing VAWA 2005, and including vital new programs for youth. It is critical, for the healthy development of young people, that full funding be provided for all programs unanimously passed by Congress. By educating youth and empowering them to live lives free from violence, we not only improve their current situation, but teach them how to live healthy adult lives. The cost of these programs is a small price to pay for the safety of our youth, and in the long term will cut down on the huge costs of domestic violence that plagues the nation.^{vi} It is time to teach young people to confront their abuse, and to learn the skills that will help them create a future without it.

The Programs

Services to Advocate for and Respond to Youth (42 USC 14043c; 119 STAT.3004)

STARY will provide much needed funding to stop the cycle of violence where it is most likely to occur, with youth ages 16 to 24.^{vii} Youth face unique challenges when dealing with domestic and dating violence and often do not have access to services to help them. Adolescence is a trying time, often filled with the insecurity and frustration of learning to navigate the adult world, while not quite being an adult. Youth are often untrusting of authority, uninformed on the law, dependent on others for their financial well being, without transportation, and ignorant of the services available to them. Special services and service providers with the skills to deal with

ⁱ Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-1999." NCJ 187635: October 2001, 3.

ⁱⁱ Snyder, H.N. (2000). *Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (NCJ 182990). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. February 2005.

^{iv} Jay Silverman, et. al., *Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality*, 286 JAMA, 2001.

^v Lee, Catherine. Witness of Domestic Violence: The Vulnerable and the Voiceless.

<http://www.jrn.columbia.edu/studentwork/children/download/domvio.shtml>.

^{vi} Intimate partner violence costs the nation \$5.8 billion dollars annually, including \$4.1 billion in direct health care expenses. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "Cost of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States." (2003).

^{vii} Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-1999." October 2001.

these unique challenges are vital to early intervention with youth dating and domestic violence. Because most domestic violence services are targeted at adults, youth are often left without important services and end up falling through the cracks, leaving them to carry these same patterns of violence into adult relationships. These grants focus specifically on services and service providers who can address the needs of youth, filling a gap in current services, and helping youth to build lives free from abuse.

STARY is a new program which we urge Congress to fully fund at it's authorized level of \$15 million in Fiscal Year 2007.

Access to Justice for Youth (42 USC 14043c-1; 119 STAT.3005)

The violence perpetrated by youth against youth is a serious problem. However, the legal system in many states does not allow youth victims the same access to justice and safety as it does adults. Youth often slip through the cracks of the justice system because neither adult nor juvenile courts know how to deal with youth perpetrators and victims of domestic and dating violence. This problem must be addressed. Currently, there is only one juvenile domestic violence court in the country. Access to Justice for Youth would provide demonstration grants to allow courts, domestic violence and sexual assault service providers, youth organizations, and law enforcement agencies to work together to create a model system which addresses the needs of youth. Both perpetrators and victims must be treated by the law in a way that allows for safety, dignity, and justice. This funding will give communities the opportunity to work together to create a system that truly meets their needs and provides victims and perpetrators the justice and protection they deserve.

Access to Justice for Youth is a new program which we urge Congress to fully fund at the authorized level of \$5 million for Fiscal Year 2007.

Supporting Teens Through Education and Protection (STEP Act; 42 USC 14043c-3; 119 STAT. 3010)

Schools have always been envisioned as a safe haven where youth learn and grow into productive citizens. However, violence in schools has shattered this idea, and left many young people afraid of the very place they are sent to grow and mature. 4,000 incidents of rape and sexual assault were reported in public schools across the country in a single year.^{viii} This number only includes the number reported, and not the countless cases of rape and sexual assault that go unreported. Additionally, when youth are faced with abusive relationships, most (73%) say they would talk about it with a friend.^{ix} Unfortunately, the friends in whom they would confide are often uninformed about the rights of youth in abusive relationships, and thus unable to help a friend in need. Young people cannot be expected to mature into productive citizens with this type of violence occurring in the place where they are to be nurtured and taught about healthy adulthood. Schools need effective policies and procedures to address this problem when it occurs among their students and school staff must be taught the warning signs of and resources available for students dealing with domestic and dating violence. The STEP Act allocates funds to educate faculty, develop effective school policies about domestic and dating violence, and provide resources to teach students about the issue and provide appropriate referrals. Fully funding this program will allow schools to work in collaboration with sexual assault and

^{viii} U.S. Department of Education, 1997 (The Department of Education no longer reports rapes and sexual assaults in schools as a separate category, but rather includes them with other violent crimes.)

^{ix} Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research. February 2005.

domestic violence providers, police, courts, and other organizations to ensure that schools are the safe and healthy environments necessary to help youth become healthy adults.

The STEP Act is a new program which we urge Congress to fully fund at the authorized level of \$5 million for Fiscal Year 2007.

Grants to Reduce Violent Crimes on Campus (42 USC 14045b; 119 STAT. 3013)

One quarter of female college students are sexually assaulted during their college careers,^x and seventy percent of sexual assaults reported by college-aged girls are date rapes.^{xi} This pervasive violence must stop, and fully funding Grants to Reduce Violent Crimes on Campus is one way that Congress can help to stop it. Often away from home for the first time and adjusting to new freedoms, college students face unique challenges, especially when it comes to dealing with domestic and sexual violence. Providing this program with full funding allows for prevention, services and training essential to end this type of violence. In the Federal Fiscal Year 2005, 146 applications were submitted to the Office on Violence Against Women, requesting 32 million dollars for campus programs. The need is great, and Congress can help by providing the full \$12 million authorized by VAWA 2005.

The President's budget requests \$9 million for Campus Grants. We urge Congress to fully fund Campus Grants at the authorized level of \$12 million in Fiscal Year 2007.

Conclusion

Sexual assault and domestic violence are problems that pervade our society. The effects of these problems are far reaching, and especially detrimental to young people navigating the transition from childhood to healthy adulthood. Young people must be taught that domestic violence and sexual assault are unacceptable. Services must be tailored to their needs and they must be educated about the resources available to them. They must be empowered to stop the violence that affects them so profoundly. They deserve the building blocks to create healthy relationships in the future.

Today's teen and young adult victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault will be those we deal with in the adult criminal, civil and family justice systems, healthcare system and social services systems tomorrow. We have the opportunity today to invest in our youth to protect them from this violence now and save countless federal dollars later.

Across the nation, young people are taking a stand against domestic violence and sexual assault. However, the funds to allow for education and services are lacking. Congress has unanimously recognized the importance of this issue by passing VAWA 2005. Now it is time for Congress to act. By fully funding VAWA 2005, and especially STARY, STEP Act, Access to Justice for Youth, and Grants to Reduce Violent Crimes against Women on Campus, Congress can do its part to combat the pervasiveness of domestic and sexual violence. By fully funding these programs, Congress will allow young people the resources necessary to mature into healthy and productive citizens. It is time to protect young people from abuse, and to teach them to build prosperous, healthy, violence-free futures.

^x Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Righting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.

^{xi} B. Levy, *Dating Violence*, (Seattle: Seal Press, 1991), 9.