

The 2013 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

In 1994, then-Senator Joe Biden led the successful effort to pass the first Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This vital legislation, which addresses **intimate partner violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking**, was reauthorized for the fourth time on March 7, 2013. Here are some of the key features of the law:

The Basics:

- **Who VAWA Helps:** Anyone can experience these crimes, though women and girls are more likely than men to experience most forms of gender-based abuse. About 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men will experience domestic violence; 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men will experience sexual assault; and 1 in 6 women and 1 in 19 men will experience stalking in their lifetimes.¹ These rates are even higher for transgender individuals.
- **How VAWA Works:** VAWA works to protect survivors and their families, make the criminal justice response to violence more effective, and support prevention activities. The various provisions of the law are funded through federal grants, administered by the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), created in 1995 as a component of the U.S. Department of Justice. The OVW provides federal leadership and administers technical assistance to communities across the country aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In 2012 OVW awarded more than \$400 million across the country.²
- **Impact of VAWA:** Since 1994, women have reported 51% more intimate partner violence and men have reported 37% more. In the same time, intimate partner violence homicides have decreased by 34% for women and 57% for men. These numbers show that VAWA has created positive change, ensuring survivors and their families have access to the services they need to ensure their safety and rebuild their lives. VAWA has also saved taxpayers approximately \$12.6 billion in reducing the need for reactive services following violence.³

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). "National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: Factsheet." www.cdc.gov.

² Office on Violence Against Women. (2013). "Awards: 2012." www.ovw.usdoj.gov.

³ National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2013). "Domestic and Sexual Violence Fact Sheet." www.nnedv.org.

Key Improvements in the 2013 Law:⁴

- **Enhanced Anti-Discrimination Policies:** The 2013 law has two separate anti-discrimination measures that are vital for the safety of survivors' and their families. The law states that no federally funded housing program may evict or otherwise discriminate against a survivor because she or he has experienced intimate partner violence or sexual assault. It also creates an emergency housing transfer process for survivors who continue to fear for their safety. In addition, the law prohibits organizations that work with survivors and receive federal money from discriminating against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) survivors.
- **New Legal Options for Native Americans:** Two-thirds of sexual and physical assaults against Native American women are committed by non-Native Americans,⁵ but Native American victims of domestic violence often cannot seek justice because their courts are not allowed to prosecute non-Native offenders - even for crimes committed on tribal land.
 - The 2013 VAWA gives tribal courts the authority to prosecute these crimes and hold offenders accountable, providing critical justice and safety to Native American survivors.
- **Easier Immigration Procedures:** The law strengthens the ability of immigrant survivors to apply for U Visas and complete a self-petition process to remain in the United States legally.
- **Stronger Requirements for Colleges and Universities:** Prior to the 2013 law, colleges and universities had to report incidents of sexual and physical assault that students formally reported to the police. Now these educational institutions have to report incidents of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking that come to their attention. In addition, colleges and universities must educate students about the rights of survivors and develop and make public their prevention plans for students and new employees.

For More Information:

- Office of Violence Against Women: <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/index.html>
- National Network to End Domestic Violence: www.nnedv.org

⁴ Adapted from: National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2013). "The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013." www.nnedv.org.

⁵ Bachman, R., et al. (2008). Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and the Criminal Justice Response: What is Known." Department of Justice. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/223691.pdf>

Get Help:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673

NCJW has worked for decades to achieve and maintain strong domestic violence legislation. NCJW's domestic violence campaign, Higher Ground, seeks to assist women escaping domestic violence in part by helping them achieve economic independence.