



Office of the San Diego City Attorney

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City Attorney

March 29, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-6050

Reauthorization of Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Grassley,

The San Diego City Attorney's Office and San Diego Family Justice Center support reauthorization of the VAWA as an important tool in the battle to protect the lives of women and children. In concert with Family Justice Centers in more than 40 states that serve 200,000 adult and child survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse, and human trafficking each year, we urge the support of the entire Committee on the Judiciary.

The San Diego Family Justice Center is a public safety initiative launched by the City of San Diego to assist victims of family violence. It was the first comprehensive "one-stop shop" in the nation for victims of family violence and their children. Under one roof, more than twenty-five agencies have come together to provide consolidated and coordinated legal, social, and health services to women, men, children, and families in need. Victims of family violence can now come to one location to talk to an advocate, pursue a restraining order, plan for their safety, talk to a police officer, meet with a prosecutor, and receive information on shelter.

The San Diego Family Justice Center is a unique and safe place where victims of domestic violence are our highest priority. We are committed to providing victims and their children the help they need to break the cycle of family violence that so often damages and destroys families. We are here to help stop domestic violence in the families of San Diego County.

Your support is particularly needed for two key areas in the VAWA. First, increased funding is needed for the Improving Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, and Stalking Grant Program (formerly known as the Grants to Encourage Arrest and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program). Over the last ten years, funding for Family Justice Centers and other collaborative approaches to support law enforcement officers and prosecutors seeking to address violence against women has been reduced by more than 20%. The reduced focus on criminal prosecution of offenders has no doubt emboldened perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault. While funding has increased for housing, civil legal services, and other responses, the

reduced funding for the criminal justice system's response and incentives to increase collaboration between advocates and law enforcement professionals has had a major negative effect. The #metoo campaign has made very clear that we must, once again, focus on civil and criminal consequences for perpetrators of violence and abuse.

Family Justice/Multi-Agency Centers have strong evidence to support their ability to increase victim safety and offender accountability. We have published research consistently in recent years demonstrating better outcomes for survivors and their children when police officers, prosecutors, advocates, medical professionals, and others co-locate under one roof. Family Justice Centers also increase offender accountability. Your support for adding Family Justice Centers to VAWA in 2005 played a powerful role in helping to launch a movement, but if we are going to continue to expand these trauma-informed, hope-centered approaches, Congress must prioritize these innovative approaches.

An increase in Title I VAWA funds will support Family Justice Centers and other types of collaborative team approaches to addressing the short-term crisis intervention challenges with violence against women as well as in creating community for survivors long after the crisis.

Second, I ask your support for funding for clinical forensic exams for domestic violence victims in VAWA 2018, with particular focus on funding for women who have been strangled by men in sexual assault and intimate partner violence cases. We have funding streams for sexual assault exams in this country but no funding stream for domestic violence victims, particularly those who survive near-fatal strangulation assaults.

Men who strangle women are the most dangerous men in the country. We use gender identifiers here intentionally. The vast majority of offenders (99%) are men. If a woman is strangled one time by her partner, she is 750% more likely to later be killed by that same partner. The hashtag (#lastwarningshot) reminds everyone that so called "choking" of an intimate partner is usually the last warning before a rage-filled man kills his partner. When he kills her, he is most likely to shoot her, but the strangulation assault was the "last warning shot." And too often it is not treated seriously by police officers, prosecutors, or judges.

Men who strangle women, are not just killing women. They are causing traumatic brain injury and many other long-term problems. Most victims initially survive such assaults by their partners. The predators, however, are causing brain damage and long-term health consequences in thousands of women without any significant consequence for their behavior. Brain damage or other major internal injuries can begin to occur seconds into a strangulation assault. This is not an isolated crime. Research has found rates of strangulation from 60-80% in Family Justice Centers (e.g., New Orleans FJC, San Diego FJC, Milwaukee Family Peace Center, and One Safe Place of Tarrant County, Texas)

Men who strangle women in domestic violence situations are also the cop killers of America. In 2017, 33 out of 44 officers killed in the line of duty in the U.S. were killed by men with a history of domestic violence in the public record – many of them with a strangulation assault history against women before they killed a police officer. Men who strangle women are also the mass murderers of the United States. Devon Patrick Kelley in Sutherland Springs, Texas – the mass murderer in the largest killing in a church in modern American history – was a domestic violence strangler before he

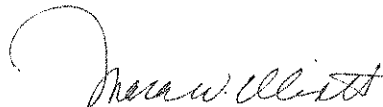
killed so many in a domestic violence related incident. The Air Force failed to treat domestic violence strangulation seriously which allowed Devon Patrick Kelley to later kill 26 women, men, and children and seriously injure 20.

Congress recognized the importance of strangulation assaults by making them a felony in the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013. But nothing was added to VAWA to provide funding for forensic examinations for strangulation victims and other domestic violence survivors, leaving victims liable for the cost of their own clinical/forensic assessments.

It will only be a matter of time until the next officer is shot to death by a strangler, a woman is shot to death after a prior strangulation assault where the offender is released from custody, or a mass shooting occurs in California where a strangler was not held accountable for a felony assault because the victim could not afford to come forward to a clinical/forensic examination after her assault. To date, 47 states have felony strangulation laws along with our felony VAWA (strangulation/suffocation) statute, but now we must ensure that victims get the medical attention they need at no cost to themselves. We have done this for rape victims, why are we not doing it for domestic violence victims?

Thank you for taking a stand on the VAWA. It has been lifesaving and culture changing legislation. But there is more to be done. Every Democrat and every Republican should support our simple, straightforward, lifesaving, common sense recommendations.

Sincerely yours,



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