

Testimony of

# **The Honorable Diane Stuart**

April 16, 2002

Mr. Chairman, Senator Grassley, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for holding this important hearing today. In particular, Senator Biden, I want to thank you for your strong leadership, your unwavering support and your commitment on violence against women issues. Your work, and the dedication of other Members of this committee, including Senator Hatch, have been instrumental in accomplishing unparalleled change and innovation in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

I am Diane Stuart, Director of the Violence Against Women Office (VAWO), which currently administers 11 grant programs, provides related training, and a wide range of technical assistance. In addition to grants management, VAWO staff serve as expert resources on violence against women for the Office of Justice Programs, the Department of Justice, and other federal agencies.

Our mission is to provide federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to:

- Reduce violence against women.
- Administer justice for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- Strengthen services to all victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

In other words, our mission is exactly what Congress intended when it passed VAWA and VAWA 2000.

Currently, there is a growing debate on just where the Violence Against Women Office should be located. Some people think that it should become an independent entity within the Department of Justice. Others think it is more effective to keep it within OJP. I am here to tell you that the Violence Against Women Office should remain within OJP. It is not where the office is located that deserves our attention, it is whether we have the structure, resources, and support necessary to help us achieve our goal: to end violence against women. Let me tell you why.

The Violence Against Women Office currently has a budget of almost \$400 million and manages more than 1,200 active grants. As you can imagine, it is critical to have the right resources in place to keep our operations running smoothly and efficiently. And fortunately, due to the strong OJP infrastructure, we are able to do just that. We rely heavily on the expertise of OJP's support offices, such as the Office of the Comptroller for financial management, the Office of Budget and Management Services for budget analysis, the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs for grant notifications, and the Office of General Counsel for advice, counsel, and support in carrying out our legislative mandates. Without the benefit of this infrastructure, we would lose the seamless communication and collaboration that we currently enjoy. Let me also explain it this way: the Violence Against Women Office currently has 43 employees. By being part of OJP, we essentially increase our person-power exponentially. As an office that manages an extraordinary number of discretionary grants (as opposed to formula grants), which adds to the complexity of our operation, we consider this support to be a true benefit of remaining within OJP.

Much of the work conducted by our office is what may be considered "policy" work. I have

recently renamed that unit in our office, "the Communication and Analysis Unit," which I think more accurately describes the work we do there. "Policy" is the common thread that is woven into everything that we do: solicitation development; grant management; the administration of technical assistance; and communication to the field. Much of this work requires close collaboration with OJP and other federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense to develop and enhance programs and policies on violence against women. For example, we are currently working with our OJP partner, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), on the development of OVC's trafficking-in-persons solicitation, a project that requires frequent contact and consultation between our two offices. We also work closely with the National Institute of Justice on developing sound and reliable ways to measure the effectiveness of VAWA programs. At the same time, NIJ depends on us to provide expert feedback on their violence against women research initiatives. We are currently working with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention on the OJP reentry initiative, to help determine the role that violence against women issues play in the return of offenders to the community after incarceration. We will also work with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) with managing some BJA grants involving development of domestic violence programs. VAWO also collaborates with other OJP offices and bureaus to coordinate the grant application peer review process and to implement the President's faith-based initiative. The point I am trying to make is that, although there are numerous bureaus and offices within OJP, in practice, we operate as one entity because of the benefits we reap from working together.

The Violence Against Women Act established coordinated, community responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking crimes. Based on the results we are seeing in the field, there is no doubt that a coordinated community response is the best approach for achieving lasting and effective results. Strong partnerships and vigorous coordination must be present at the federal, state, local and tribal levels in order for real change to occur. We also believe this is true for the Violence Against Women Office and OJP. OJP's primary goal is to provide the tools to enhance communities' ability to respond to local crime problems. Therefore, it makes perfect sense for the Violence Against Women Office to continue working under the auspices of OJP where the complementary nature of our missions and goals can be further enhanced and promoted.

The Violence Against Women Office has made amazing progress since the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994. Where at one time there were only a handful of experts on violence against women, there are now hundreds of professionals from all areas of the criminal justice system who have the expertise to educate and train law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, advocates and others in the field on how to respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. VAWO staff are no longer the only experts, instead, we are increasingly able to link other expert resources with projects in need of guidance. Groups such as the Battered Women's Justice Project, Praxis International, and the National Training Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence provide the hands-on training to states and localities that need assistance to get new programs off the ground. Organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the American Probation and Parole Association, and the National District Attorneys' Association have created initiatives to help their members develop specialized knowledge on topics such as police response to domestic violence, batterer intervention, and the creation of domestic violence courts. The Violence Against Women Office serves as the national vehicle for coordinating these pivotal resources and offering guidance and consultation on promising practices.

We use various "tools" to carry out our mission and stay closely connected with the field. These

tools include our grant programs, the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women, our technical assistance initiatives, and frequent interaction with our grantees and myriad experts across our nation. I'd like to explain each of these tools in greater detail.

First, VAWA Grant Programs. VAWO currently administers 11 grant programs. Through our grant programs, funds are provided to various organizations and state and local government agencies to create and enhance services and training on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Though these programs are all quite new, with STOP having the longest funding history - eight years -- the programs have already produced remarkable results. We are reaching more women with more services than ever before. For example, in FY 1999 and 2000 alone, STOP funding supported 4,370 separate projects, and 43 percent of all victims served with STOP funds were in groups that were previously underserved.

We are seeing innovation and collaboration that reflect the spirit of the Violence Against Women Act. More interdisciplinary teams of law enforcement, advocates, corrections, judges, and prosecutors are being developed throughout the country. In my home state of Utah, STOP funds are used to provide a medical response team that accompanies victims to the hospital. In California, experts from the sexual assault field were added to the state's STOP Task Force. In Ohio, state subgrantees are required to target underserved populations, and now reach the hearing impaired, migrant workers, and Amish, as well as victims in rural Appalachia and the African-American community in urban centers. And, the grant funding set-asides have allowed us to expand services to so many Native American women.

These are but a few of the hundreds of ways in which our programs are beginning to change women's lives and the response of the criminal justice community to violence against women.

Second, the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women. The National Advisory Committee was established in 1995 to provide guidance on implementing VAWA. The Committee is chaired by the effective team of the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and is comprised of experts in the fields of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. I was privileged to serve on this Committee as we developed a comprehensive plan to end violence against women -- Ending Violence Against Women: An Agenda for the Nation. They also developed the Toolkit to End Violence Against Women, a Web-based guide to assist communities and individuals engaged in activities to end violence against women. The charter for the Committee was recently renewed.

Third, Technical Assistance. VAWO's Technical Assistance (TA) Program plays an essential role in implementing VAWA. It is not a program that was created by statute, but one that we created first to provide all VAWA grantees with the expertise and support they need to develop and implement successful projects. Our technical assistance also allows us to reach the entire criminal justice system - law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, courts, and state attorneys general- to provide them with an understanding of the complexities of violence against women issues and the knowledge to effectively respond to victims and enforce the laws. We consider TA providers to be extensions of our staff. The TA Program helps to build the capacity of local communities and national organizations to respond to and address these horrendous and difficult crimes..

Fourth, Interaction. The day-to-day interaction of our staff with individuals within OJP, within the Department of Justice, with other federal agencies, and with those in the field is essential to presenting a comprehensive picture of how the Violence Against Women Act is being carried out across the nation. Through all of these relationships, we gain knowledge that allows us to determine where our efforts should be directed and to identify what programs are and are not

working. Interaction with individuals in the field, whether it be at a conference, during a phone call, or during a visit, is infinitely valuable in the work we do and provides us with some of our most useful information. Their ideas, suggestions, and criticisms keep us on the right path, keep us current on what is happening in our communities, and offer us a fresh perspective on issues we grapple with every day. This close collaboration between our Office and those working in research, policy, and practice, is in direct support of the philosophy and spirit of the Violence Against Women Act. It is critical to our mission.

We have established many ambitious priorities for our Office during the coming year to help fulfill that mission. Program sustainability is one of our priorities. Many of our grantees depend solely upon VAWO funding to keep their programs in operation. There will never be enough money to support all current and future grantees. Therefore, it is imperative that grantees begin thinking of ways in which their programs can continue to exist, and even thrive, without dependence on federal funding. We now require all our grantees to submit a sustainability plan in their proposals. In the near future I plan to hold a focus group with practitioners in the field to discuss innovative ways in which grantees can think smarter about sustainability.

One of my priorities, which is strongly supported by Assistant Attorney General Daniels, is to develop ways to improve our ability to measure the effectiveness of VAWA grant programs. We want to know: Do they work? Are they producing the outcomes that were originally intended? What is the impact of VAWA on communities? Are we really making a difference?

To this end, we have embarked on a special initiative to find the answers to these questions. In conjunction with the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine, the Violence Against Women Office is creating a tool to assist grantees with the identification and collection of data so that we have a consistent and reliable method for analyzing the effectiveness of the programs and relaying that information to Congress.

My commitment, the commitment of the Violence Against Women Office, OJP and the Department of Justice is to ensure that the mission of the Violence Against Women Act is fulfilled. I want to make it clear that the Violence Against Women Office doesn't just write checks - as some have suggested. Through every solicitation, through every technical assistance project, through every monitoring visit, through every conference, through all of our activities we are guiding the policies that Congress set forward. As we administer and manage millions of dollars of grants that reach thousands of communities, we are ensuring that we are effectively changing the culture surrounding violence against women. It is only when this society truly understands the incredibly debilitating and horrendous consequences of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, that we will have a real chance to end violence against women.

Keeping the Violence Against Women Office within OJP will allow us to concentrate on developing the programs and policies to address these violent crimes, while being able to rely on the effective coordination and support of these initiatives within the OJP infrastructure. Our success greatly depends on our ability to access and effectively use the tools currently available to us. The collaborative nature of our work requires that we reach out beyond the confines of our office to the offices, organizations, and individuals who work with us every day to keep women safe and hold offenders accountable for their violent actions. We look forward to continuing this important work until that day when there will no longer be a need for a Violence Against Women Office.

Thank you.