

Statement of
The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
July 19, 2005

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Statement of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold
At the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
"Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act"

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Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this hearing. Although Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act ("VAWA") in 1994 and reauthorized it in 2000, violence against women remains pervasive. Nearly one in four women are physically assaulted by at least one partner during their adult lives. According to the Department of Justice, 20% of violence against women in 2001 was committed by an intimate partner. Only 1 in 7 of these assaults comes to the attention of the police, and the number of sexual assaults reported is even less, with only 1 in 5 of those assaults reported. According to the Center for Disease Control, approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year. Approximately 3 million children in the United States are exposed to domestic violence in their homes each year, and the National Crime Victimization Survey found that approximately 4 out of 10 victims of domestic violence lived in households with children under 12.

We should all be appalled by these statistics. Unfortunately, these numbers do not even begin to convey the devastating long-term consequences of this violence on the physical, emotional and economic well-being of victims and their families. Clearly, we have a long way to go to eliminate domestic violence in our communities. We can, and we must, do better.

The 2005 VAWA reauthorization introduced by my colleague and friend, Senator Biden, is a very important step in the right direction. It builds on the success of crucial VAWA programs, while adopting a more comprehensive approach to a problem that permeates so many areas of victims' lives.

The reauthorizing legislation would strengthen existing grant programs, which have proved to be a critical resource for law enforcement and organizations providing services to victims. It also includes important provisions that will address the severe lack of affordable and transitional housing available for victims fleeing an abuser, increase our prevention efforts through early intervention and support services for children, and improve the health care system's response to victims of domestic and sexual violence. And it contains further improvements to provisions aimed at addressing the unique circumstances of disabled, elderly, immigrant, and ethnic minority women, and victims living in rural areas, in addition to a new title devoted to tribal programs.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Biden and his staff have done a great deal of work on this issue over the years, and I commend him for that. In addition, I would like to highlight the work of many organizations in my home state of Wisconsin, including the Center Against Domestic Abuse of Superior, the Task Force on Family Violence of Milwaukee, Unidos Against Domestic Violence of Madison, New Horizons Shelter and Women's Center of Whitehall, Friends Aware of Violent Relationships of Fond du Lac, the Women's Center of Waukesha, Safe Harbor of Sheboygan, Beloit Domestic Violence Center, and the Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services of Marinette. These tireless advocates are on the frontlines of delivering services to victims and their families. I would like to place letters from these groups in support of VAWA in the record of this hearing.

It is critical that we build on the successes of the programs established by the Violence Against Women Act. The victims and children that these programs are meant to protect will suffer the impact most severely if we do not reauthorize and improve this legislation. I would like to thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing, and I look forward to supporting this bill when it comes before the Committee.