

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
United States Senate  
January 26, 2012

As our first order of legislative business this year, I am asking the Committee to help pass the bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. For almost 18 years, the Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA, has been the centerpiece of the Federal Government's commitment to combat domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence.

No other law has done more to stop domestic and sexual violence in our communities. The resources and training provided by VAWA have changed attitudes toward these reprehensible crimes, improved the response of law enforcement and the justice system, and provided essential services for victims struggling to rebuild their lives. It is a law that has saved countless lives, and it is an example of what we can accomplish when we work together.

The bipartisan reauthorization bill that I introduced with Senator Crapo, and that many Senators on this Committee have joined, reflects Congress's ongoing commitment to end domestic and sexual violence. It seeks to expand the law's focus on sexual assault, to ensure access to services for all victims of domestic and sexual violence, to reduce domestic violence-related homicides, and to confront the crisis of domestic and sexual violence in tribal communities, among other important steps. It also reflects to these difficult economic times by consolidating programs, reducing authorization levels, and adding accountability measures to ensure that Federal funds are used efficiently and effectively. As we read about cities such as Topeka, Kansas being faced with their own budget crises and deciding for a time to suspend prosecutions of domestic violence to save money, we need to move forward without delay to reaffirm that this is a priority for all Americans.

I understand that Senator Grassley has requested that the Committee delay action until next week. At that time I intend to offer an amendment that responds to concerns he and other Senators have raised with the bill as introduced. I will go as far as I can to accommodate Senators' concerns but I will not abandon core principles of fairness. We must join together to protect some of the most vulnerable victims of violence, including battered immigrants assisting law enforcement and those who have traditionally had trouble accessing services. All victims of domestic and sexual violence deserve protection and access to services.

In the end, I hope that all Senators on this Committee will join to support this bill and this important effort to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. This is the fourth reauthorization of this critical legislation. Senator Hatch and others on this Committee joined with me to work on earlier authorizations over almost 20 years. I have always appreciated Senator Hatch's support and hope that he will join with us again soon. I remember in 2000 when we were working on an earlier reauthorization and he asked rhetorically if VAWA made a

difference. His answer then was, as he put it, a "resounding yes." Twelve years later, VAWA continues to make a difference. It helps save lives and restore lives every day.

So I hope that after the postponement Senator Grassley has requested, we can move forward next week in a bipartisan way on such a straightforward and important issue.

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