



National Alliance to
End Sexual Violence

*A NATIONAL VOICE FOR STATE
AND LOCAL ADVOCATES DEDICATED
TO ENDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE.*

March 29, 2012

The Violence Against Women Act and Sexual Assault: A Press Guide

Improving the Criminal Justice Response to Rape

There has been little or no change in the rates of rape prosecution in the last two decades and lack of prosecution allows serial rapists to go free. S. 1925 strengthens the STOP and Arrest grant programs to better respond to rape. Improvements include a 20% set-aside for sexual assault projects and new purpose areas to support Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs; Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) and reductions in the rape kit backlog. “The compassionate care I received from well-trained individuals from the first 911 call all the way through sentencing literally saved my life. The nurses, the Sexual Assault Response Team in Miami-Dade County, law enforcement and the state attorney's office gave me the strength to pursue justice, and eventually secure a conviction, against my rapist. Although nothing will ever change the horrific and violent events of that day, I am filled with hope for a brighter future because of the services these people provided for my family. I want every victim to have the same responses I had, and the Violence Against Women Act is critical to that goal. I hope S. 1925 passes soon.”

Julie Weil, Jupiter, Florida
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Housing Protections

S. 1925 extends VAWA housing protections to victims of sexual assault in all public housing programs and provides options for sexual assault victims to transfer quickly to a safer location. “On June 18, 2007, ten armed youths between the ages of 14 and 18 forced themselves into a Florida woman's apartment in Dunbar Village, where they repeatedly raped her and poured household chemicals into her son's eyes and over her body. This victim was not protected by VAWA but would be under the new provisions in S. 1925.” Terri Poore, Vice President, NAESV, tpoore@fcasv.org

Sexual Assault Intervention

The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP), administered by the Office on Violence Against Women and reauthorized in S. 1925, provides formula grants to states, territories and tribes for direct services to adult and minor sexual assault victims. Across the country, SASP funds support the critical services victims needs most including accompaniment through medical and criminal justice systems. Research shows these services increase prosecution, mitigate long-term reactions and help victims recover, but 25% of rape crisis centers have a waiting list for basic services according to a 2010 survey.

“SASP allowed us to finally open a comprehensive service rape crisis center in Dallas. Since we opened our doors in 2009, SASP funding has assisted us in maintaining staff members who provide critical services to sexual assault survivors and their loved ones including our 24-hour dedicated sexual assault crisis hotline, individual and group counseling services, and our hospital and criminal justice accompaniment programs.” Jana Barker, Executive Director, Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center

Preventing Sexual Violence

The Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE), administered by the CDC and reauthorized in S. 1925, provides essential funding to states and territories to support prevention and education programs for youth and professionals.

Over 2.5 million people received prevention information through RPE programs in 2010.

Evidence-based bystander intervention programs like Green Dot help youth on campus and in high schools stand up against sexual violence.

Sexual Assault is a Huge Problem

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (CDC, December 2011) found:

- Nearly 1 in 5 women have been the victim of rape or attempted rape and nearly 1 in 2 have experienced some form of sexual violence.
- 1 in 5 men have experienced a form of sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime.
- 1.3 million women were raped in the United States in the last 12 months.

“Almost 1 in 5 women in this country has been the victim of rape. Some of those women are lucky enough to have the offender prosecuted and receive recovery services—many more are not and are left to bare the brutality of rape on their own. We cannot afford to play politics with victims’ lives. S. 1925 has the tools to strengthen the criminal justice and victim services response to sexual assault. Far too many girls and boys and one of the next five women you encounter will need that help in their lifetime. Congress must reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act now.”

Monika Johnson Hostler, President, NAESV, monika@endsexualviolence.org

Leanna’s Story:

“The programs and services that are funded through VAWA are essential to healing for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. My own story demonstrates just how important those services are.

In 1976, at the age of 14, I was raped. The perpetrator told me that “we” would get in trouble if anyone found out about what “we” did. This was my first sexual encounter, and I felt so awful when it was over that I knew I must have done something wrong—that what happened must have been my fault. I vowed to tell no one, and to keep my shameful secret to myself. Any confidence in my abilities and any self-esteem were shattered in that moment. I withdrew from my friends and family. I became increasingly quiet and really made every effort to become invisible. I kept that secret for over 30 years, during which I turned to drugs and alcohol to try to cope with the shame, the blame and the guilt.

In April of 2008, I was nearly murdered, held hostage and raped. I had eight months clean and sober at the time, and was trying to turn my life around. Luckily, through a series of miracles—divine intervention—I did not die. However, as I was laying in the emergency room afterward, I felt the familiar weight of shame and guilt on my heart. I thought that if I could just drop out of sight for a week or two, the bruises would heal, I could pull myself together, and I wouldn’t have to tell my friends or family what had just happened. Immediately, I was overcome with desperation. I could not do this again. I could not do this anymore. My next thought was that I would get out of the hospital and find a way to end my life. That seemed far better than living with the shame of yet another incident.

A few minutes later, two women came into my room. They introduced themselves as volunteers with the Rape Assistance and Awareness Program. They asked about what had happened, and they told me that it wasn’t my fault. In that moment, I saw a glimmer of hope. I didn’t fully believe what they were saying, but I decided that I would seek help. They said that RAAP had therapists and a case manager that could help me work through my own feelings and the process of following through legally. After they left, I picked up the phone to call a friend, and at least briefly, explain what had happened.

I attended both individual therapy and two different closed groups through RAAP. It took so much energy and time to keep working through all the layers of trauma from both the recent assault and the previous one. The hard work was very much worthwhile though. I can now look at myself in the mirror. I attend college and participate in my classes. I have close friends and enjoy my life. I am not afraid to share my thoughts and opinions or to ask for help. I also have become active in my community, volunteering for the Rape Assistance and Awareness Program, for the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and as a speaker for the Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Victim Impact Program (which helps offenders understand the effects of crime). In addition, I recently completed the 40-hour Helpline Training for the Phoenix Center at Auraria which offers resources to help those in abusive relationships as well as victims of sexual assault. None of this would have happened without the therapy, support and encouragement of trained people offering the resources that I so desperately needed.” Leanna Stoufer, Denver, Colorado, lstoufer@student.cccs.edu

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