



National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

Written Testimony for the Record of Terri Poore, Policy Director
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
“Renewing and Strengthening the Violence Against Women Act”
October 5, 2021

On behalf of the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV), representing 56 state and territorial sexual assault coalitions and more than 1500 local rape crisis centers, I respectfully submit this testimony in support of renewing, strengthening, and reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA is a vital component of the nation’s response to sexual assault survivors and efforts to prevent sexual violence from occurring in the first place.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)* reveals that domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking are insidious, pervasive, and deadly crimes. Nearly one in five women have been raped in their lifetime; nearly one in two women have experienced some form of sexual violence.¹ With the #MeToo movement and high-profile cases of sexual violence, there’s more demand than ever for recovery services. Our message to survivors must be clear: when you come forward for help and support, it will be available.

The Sexual Assault Services Program

Our nation has made notable progress in understanding and addressing violence against women, because Congress has made an annual investment since FY 2008. The Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP), a formula grant program authorized in VAWA, funds rape crisis centers through state formula grants, ensuring that victims of sexual assault have access to vital medical services, legal advocacy, and counseling. Advocates help the criminal justice system respond more

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/NISVSpubs.html>

effectively. According to the Office on Violence Against Women's most recent report to Congress, over 55,000 victims were served by the SASP program in one year.²

Victims of sexual assault suffer. They are more likely to struggle professionally, academically and from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and to contemplate suicide. SASP funds ensure quality services. Through support of coalitions which provide training and technical assistance, SASP helps ensure that victims receive high quality services and improved responses from the criminal justice system. SASP funds also support underserved communities. Grants to culturally specific organizations help support intervention and related assistance for underserved victims and communities of color.

According to [2021 data](#), 62% of rape crisis programs have a waiting list for counseling services with many survivors waiting many weeks or even months for counseling. Attention to campus and military sexual assault cases, as well as high profile media cases, has meant more victims have come forward needing critical recovery services. Almost 2/3 of programs experienced increased demand last year while trying to help survivors through the pandemic. Programs must be expanded to meet the demand.³

It is essential that the Sexual Assault Services Program is reauthorized, that its authorization is increased, and that services are expanded to include direct financial assistance for survivors.

The Economic Needs of Survivors Should be Addressed in the Sexual Assault Services Program:

Survivors of sexual violence bear the economic burden of their assault and enduring trauma, including covering medical costs, mental health services, lost work/school, and collateral consequence across the life course. Older reports from the National Institute of Justice⁴ estimated that victims spend an average of \$500 to \$8,000 for medical costs related to injury, \$2,400 for mental health related services, and lose up to 11 days of paid work as a consequence of the physical and mental strain following an assault.⁵ The estimated lifetime cost of rape is \$122,461 per survivor, or a population-based economic burden of nearly \$3.1 trillion (2014 U.S. dollars) over survivors' lifetimes. This estimate included \$1.2 trillion (39%) in medical costs, and \$1.6 trillion (52%) in lost work productivity among survivors and perpetrators.⁶

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, economic insecurity is a risk factor for experiencing sexual violence.⁷ During the pandemic, many people are experiencing economic

² https://www.vawamei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016_sexual_assault_services_program_sasp_report_to_congress_aug2018.pdf

³ https://www.raliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FundingforRCC2021_Final508.pdf

⁴ <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf>

⁵ While more updated national data is needed, CalCASA provides a summary of costs of SA to victim, agency, and state in California in this 2018 report: http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CALCASA_CCoSV_FINALSpreads_2018.pdf

⁶ [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(16\)30615-8/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(16)30615-8/abstract)

⁷ <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/economics-factor-sexual-violence>

insecurity, and with the mass loss of jobs and the impact of school and daycare closures due to COVID, the ability for survivors to achieve economic stability has been put under direct threat.

Reports of landlords propositioning and [sexually harassing their tenants](#) have also surfaced, as housing insecurity increases vulnerability, which predatory landlords exploit.⁸ Sheryl Ring, the legal director at [Open Communities](#) of Chicago, [reported](#) a 300% increase in reported cases of sexual harassment complaints in housing during just the first month of the pandemic.⁹

These unforeseen costs and impacts of sexual assault can increase the likelihood of homelessness, unemployment and interrupted careers or education.¹⁰ This can create cyclical risk of revictimization, since an individual with an income under \$7,500 is twice as likely to face sexual assault as the general population due to increased vulnerability.¹¹ Without economic resources, survivors may have more difficulty relocating, switching jobs, changing identities or any other steps that may be necessary to protect them from further abuse.¹²

According to research conducted in 2015, liquid assets can help offset post-assault expenses and facilitate access to services.¹³

Survivors of Sexual Violence need direct financial assistance for many reasons related to their direct experiences of crime, trauma and victimization. Some examples include:

- Lost wages or loss of other financial support
- Medical costs not covered by states related to forensic exam, or other medical needs if no exam is requested
- Mental health services
- Replacement bedding or clothing or other household items
- Security measures: locks, car security, technology safety, replacing cell phones, other electronic devices
- “crime scene” clean up
- Relocation Expenses—first/last month’s rent, security deposit
- Other travel expenses i.e. to travel back for hearings after moving away
- Utilities
- Food

Rape Prevention & Education Program:

Just as SASP is essential to supporting services for survivors, the Rape Prevention & Education Program (RPE) is essential to the nation’s prevention response to sexual violence. RPE formula grants, administered by the CDC Injury Center, provide essential funding to states and territories to support rape prevention and education programs conducted by rape crisis centers, state sexual assault

⁸ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/amberjamieson/renter-sexually-harassed-by-landlord-during-coronavirus>

⁹ <https://www.insider.com/landlords-are-using-covid-19-fear-to-sexually-harass-tenants-2020-4>

¹⁰ http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/poverty_and_sexual_violence_building_prevention_and_intervention_responses.pdf

¹¹ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cvus96.pdf>

¹² <https://www.safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/In-Focus-Sexual-Violence-and-Economic-Security-2015.pdf>

¹³ <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015573966>

coalitions, and other public and private nonprofit entities. In the past few years, demand for programs funded by RPE have skyrocketed, the evidence base has progressed significantly, the current appropriation is very nearly the authorized level, and further investment in the program is desperately needed.

Moreover, we know RPE is working. A 2016 study conducted in 26 Kentucky high schools over 5 years and published in *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that an RPE-funded bystander intervention program decreased not only sexual violence perpetration but also other forms of interpersonal violence and victimization.¹⁴

Funded involvement of state sexual assault coalitions is imperative for the success of RPE:

RPE was first authorized in the 1994 version of VAWA and has been reauthorized subsequently with each iteration of legislation. RPE was the brainchild of National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV) founder, Gail Burns-Smith, as a coordinated federal response to the prevention of sexual violence. While funding goes to state health departments, the original intent of the RPE program was to fully involve state sexual assault coalitions and rape crisis centers as leaders in this work because of their vast experience in addressing sexual violence. Over the years, the level of involvement of state coalitions has varied among states. At the same time, there are states in which the state sexual assault coalition has never been meaningfully involved in RPE.

Communities deserve the best, most well-informed prevention efforts especially in this era where demand and interest in sexual violence prevention is so high. We know, with the funded involvement of state sexual assault coalitions and increased funding, RPE can be an even more powerful tool in ending sexual violence.

The reauthorization of VAWA must significantly increase the authorization of the RPE program and add language requiring the funded involvement of state sexual assault coalitions in state-level planning and implementation of RPE.

Tribes must be able to prosecute non-native offenders of sexual assault:

While SASP and RPE are VAWA's cornerstones of response to sexual assault, the needs of survivors go well beyond these two signature programs. Of deep concern to NAESV, tribal governments are currently unable to prosecute crimes of sexual assault, trafficking, child abuse, and stalking by non-native offenders on their lands. A 2016 study from the National Institute for Justice (NIJ), found that approximately 56% of Native women experience sexual violence within their lifetime, with 1 in 7 experiencing it in the past year.¹⁵ Nearly 1 in 2 report being stalked. Contrary to the general population where rape, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence are usually *intra*-racial, Native women are more likely to be raped or assaulted by someone of a different race. 96% of Native women and 89% of male victims in the NIJ study reported being victimized by a non-Indian. Native victims of sexual violence are three times as likely to have experienced sexual violence by an interracial perpetrator as non-Hispanic White victims. Similarly, Native stalking victims are nearly 4 times as likely to be stalked

¹⁴ [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(17\)30027-2/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(17)30027-2/fulltext)

¹⁵ <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-women-and-men>

by someone of a different race, with 89% of female stalking victims and 90% of male stalking victims reporting inter-racial victimization. The higher rate of inter-racial violence would not necessarily be significant if it were not for the jurisdictional complexities unique to Indian Country and the limitations imposed by federal law on tribal authority to hold non-Indians accountable for crimes they commit on tribal lands.

We affirm tribes' sovereignty to prosecute non-native offenders of sexual assault, child abuse, trafficking and stalking. VAWA 2013 restored the authority of Tribes to arrest and prosecute offenders, regardless of their race, for acts of domestic violence committed within the boundaries of their jurisdiction. Since enactment, at least 16 Tribes have undertaken the steps to exercise the special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction (SDVCJ) restored by VAWA 2013 – leading to over 120 arrests. Tribal victims deserve justice, and we fully support expanding the tribal sovereignty provisions of VAWA to include sexual assault, trafficking, child abuse and stalking by non-native offenders.

Many survivors of sexual assault need housing assistance:

Many survivors of sexual assault, abuse, and harassment have housing needs. For some survivors, home may not be a safe place and they may need to leave due to sexual violence they are experiencing that is perpetrated by a household member, landlord, or neighbor. Other survivors may need to find safe housing to heal and lessen the effects of sexual violence they have experienced either in their home or they may need to find new housing if the perpetrator knows where they live to stay safe. VAWA includes important protections for survivors of sexual assault in public housing, and these provisions are a critical part of the safety net for survivors. The reauthorization of VAWA must protect and expand these important housing protections including ensuring that homeless sexual violence survivors have access to housing.

VAWA must protect all survivors:

VAWA must maintain historic provisions that protect survivors like those that prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and must go further to meet the needs of safety and justice for all survivors.

We urge the Senate to reauthorize and strengthen VAWA right away to meet the nation's commitment to address and end gender-based violence. Please feel free to contact me at terri@endsexualviolence with any questions.