



# OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE: January 11, 2012**

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## **ATTORNEY GENERAL CALLS ON CONGRESS TO REAUTHORIZE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT**

**Las Vegas, NV** - Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto joined 52 other attorneys general in calling on the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and ensure that vital programs working to keep women and families safe from violence and abuse continue uninterrupted.

“The Violence Against Women Act is a critical program that helps individuals, families and communities in Nevada and across the country combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking,” said Masto. “Despite the fact that progress has been made on this issue, the fight against domestic violence continues. Reauthorizing this critical program will help save countless lives in the Silver State.”

While rates of domestic violence have dropped by over 50 percent in the past 17 years, the issues addressed by VAWA are still very much at the forefront of the crime fight. Tragically, three women are killed each day in the United States by abusive husbands and partners, and for every victim who loses her life, there are nine more who narrowly escape.

Nevada ranks number one in the rate of women murdered by men for a second year in a row, according to a study by the Violence Policy Center. Victims of domestic violence comprise the largest crime victim category in Nevada.

Citing the need to maintain services to victims and families on the local, state, and federal level, the Attorneys General urged Congress to reauthorize VAWA for the first time since 2006. They note that reauthorization would not only allow existing programs to continue uninterrupted, but would also provide for the development of new initiatives aimed at key areas most in need of intervention.

These initiatives include:

- Addressing the high rates of domestic violence, dating violence and sexual assault among women aged 16-24. Programs will work to combat tolerant youth attitudes toward violence and break the cycle in which women who experience abuse as teens are more likely to be victimized again as adults.
- Improving the response to sexual assault across disciplines by implementing best practices, training, and communication tools among the healthcare, law enforcement, and legal services a victim encounters after an assault. This includes responding to sexually trafficked and exploited minors.
- Preventing domestic violence homicides by enhancing training for law enforcement, advocates, and others who interact with those at risk. A growing number of experts and researchers agree that these homicides are predictable – and therefore preventable – if we know the warning signs.
- Expanding programs to assist all disciplines to more effectively respond to the children exposed to domestic, dating and sexual violence in their lives.

A copy of the letter can be found here: <http://bit.ly/NAAGVAWA>.

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January 11, 2012

Dear Members of Congress,

Since its passage in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”) has shined a bright light on domestic violence, bringing the issue out of the shadows and into the forefront of our efforts to protect women and families. VAWA transformed the response to domestic violence at the local, state and federal level. Its successes have been dramatic, with the annual incidence of domestic violence falling by more than 50 percent<sup>1</sup>.

Even though the advancements made since in 1994 have been significant, a tremendous amount of work remains and we believe it is critical that the Congress reauthorize VAWA. Every day in this country, abusive husbands or partners kill three women, and for every victim killed, there are nine more who narrowly escape that fate<sup>2</sup>. We see this realized in our home states every day. Earlier this year in Delaware, three children – ages 12, 2 ½ and 1 ½ – watched their mother be beaten to death by her ex-boyfriend on a sidewalk. In Maine last summer, an abusive husband subject to a protective order murdered his wife and two young children before taking his own life.

Reauthorizing VAWA will send a clear message that this country does not tolerate violence against women and show Congress’ commitment to reducing domestic violence, protecting women from sexual assault and securing justice for victims.

VAWA reauthorization will continue critical support for victim services and target three key areas where data shows we must focus our efforts in order to have the greatest impact:

- Domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault are most prevalent among young women aged 16-24, with studies showing that youth attitudes are still largely tolerant of violence, and that women abused in adolescence are more likely to be abused again as adults. VAWA reauthorization will help us break that cycle by consolidating and strengthening programs aimed at both prevention and intervention, with a particular emphasis on more effectively engaging men and local community-based resources in the process.

- A woman who has been sexually assaulted can be subjected to further distress when the healthcare, law enforcement, and legal response to her attack is not coordinated and productive. Whether it is a first responder without

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (Sept. 2009) *Criminal Victimization, 2008*.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation between Lynn Rosenthal and with Jackie Campbell, May 2010.

adequate training, a rape kit that goes unprocessed for lack of funding, or a phone call between a crisis counselor and a prosecutor that never takes place, sexual assault victims deserve better. We must develop and implement best practices, training, and communication tools across disciplines in order to effectively prosecute and punish perpetrators, as well as help victims heal and rebuild their lives.


- There is a growing consensus among practitioners and researchers that domestic violence homicides are predictable and, therefore, often preventable. We can save the lives of untold numbers of potential homicide victims with better training for advocates, law enforcement, and others who interact with victims to recognize the warning signs and react meaningfully.

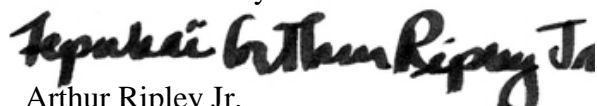
The fight to protect women from violence is one that never ends. It is not a year-to-year issue, which is why we think it is critical that Congress reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act. We know a great deal more about domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking than we did 17 years ago. Reauthorizing VAWA will allow us to build on those lessons and continue to make progress and save lives.

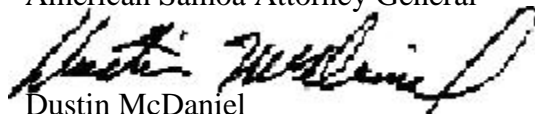
VAWA was last reauthorized in 2006 and time is of the essence for reauthorization of this important law. We urge Congress to take on this critical mission and reauthorize VAWA.

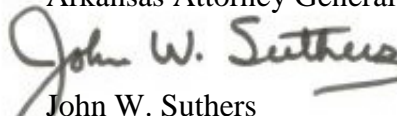
Thank you.


Sincerely,


  
Joseph R. "Beau" Biden III  
Delaware Attorney General

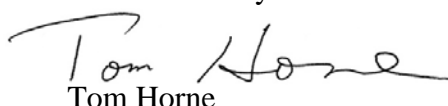
  
Arthur Ripley Jr.  
American Samoa Attorney General

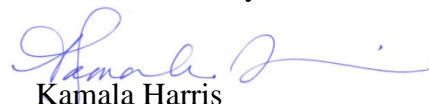
  
Dustin McDaniel  
Arkansas Attorney General

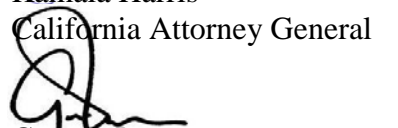
  
John W. Suthers  
Colorado Attorney General

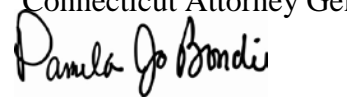
  
Irvin Nathan  
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William J. Schneider  
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Tom Horne  
Arizona Attorney General

  
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George Jepsen  
Connecticut Attorney General

  
Pam Bondi  
Florida Attorney General



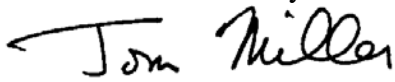
Sam Olens  
Georgia Attorney General



David Louie  
Hawaii Attorney General




Lisa Madigan  
Illinois Attorney General



Tom Miller  
Iowa Attorney General



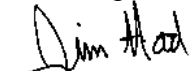
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Maryland Attorney General



Bill Schuette  
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Steve Bullock  
Montana Attorney General



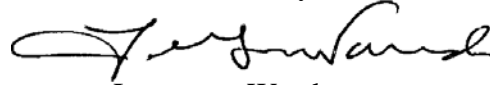
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Jeffrey Chiesa  
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Lenny Rapadas  
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Lawrence Wasden  
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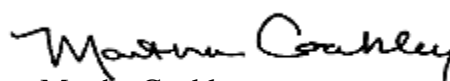
Greg Zoeller  
Indiana Attorney General



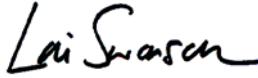
Derek Schmidt  
Kansas Attorney General



James "Buddy" Caldwell  
Louisiana Attorney General



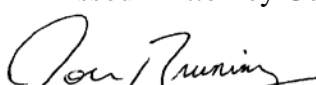
Martha Coakley  
Massachusetts Attorney General



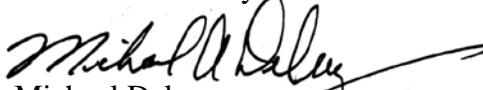
Lori Swanson  
Minnesota Attorney General



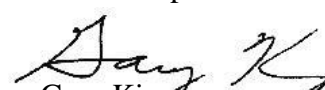
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