



**NNEEDV**  
NATIONAL NETWORK  
TO END DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE

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## Priorities for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress: Legislation and Funding to Address Survivors' Needs

### Introduction

Our nation is in the midst of multiple, intersecting crises that exacerbate disparities and endanger survivors of domestic violence. To make real strides in reducing gender-based violence during this challenging time, Congress must invest in strategies that advance access to safety, justice, and economic stability for survivors, while reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors. All funding and policies must center the needs of historically marginalized survivors by standing up against transphobia and homophobia, racism and sexism, and advancing racial equity, as well as supporting funding and policies to reduce barriers to safety and justice for survivors who face ongoing oppression and discrimination.

This document outlines the legislative priorities of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEEDV) and how Congress can make real the changes survivors need.

In 2021, we published [The Next Steps to Ending Domestic Violence: 100 Day and Ongoing Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration](#) and, together with our recommendations for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, these documents provide a roadmap to creating the necessary federal changes that will ultimately address survivors' long-term security.

NNEEDV celebrates the remarkable progress of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, which included successes on a number of our key priorities:

- ★ The [American Rescue Plan](#) included substantial resources that address survivors' needs, including \$400 million for domestic violence and sexual assault services and \$5 billion for Emergency Housing Vouchers and \$5 billion in HOME funds, which were directly targeted for survivors;
- ★ The FY 21 and FY 22 federal appropriations included substantial increases in priority victim services funding;
- ★ The [VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021](#) ("VOCA Fix") was signed into law July 2021;
- ★ The [Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021](#) was signed into law

March 2022;

- ★ [The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#) was signed into law June 2022;
- ★ The Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2021 ([H.R. 2119](#) and [S. 1275](#)) was passed in the House and passed out of the Senate HELP committee with bipartisan support; and
- ★ The passage of other key legislation including the [Safe Connections Act](#), [Joint Consolidation Loan Separation Act](#), [Savings Access for Escaping and Rebuilding Act](#), the [Pregnant Worker Fairness Act](#), and the [PUMP Act](#).

NNEDV urges the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to build on these successes by restoring VOCA funding; investing in effective programs through the FY 24 Appropriations process; reauthorizing and building upon key laws; and passing new legislation to meet the housing, economic, and other needs of survivors. These priorities are discussed below.

### **Restore Deposits into the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) & Increase the Amount Released for Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Programs in FY 24**

#### ***Committees: Judiciary and Appropriations (House and Senate)***

The Crime Victims Fund (CVF) is a non-taxpayer source of funding that supports the annual appropriation of funds via the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA funds nearly 6,500 victim services organizations. Sustained VOCA funds are needed to respond to the dangerous lack of available services for victims.

- ★ Without VOCA funds, many victim service programs would be forced to lay off staff, reduce services and in some cases, cease to exist, leaving survivors and victims with nowhere to turn.
- ★ Deposits into the CVF began to decline several years ago; as a result, Congress was forced to decrease the amount released for VOCA. This led to drastic funding cuts for local victim service providers.
- ★ Congress passed the [VOCA Fix Act in 2021](#), directing deposits from deferred prosecutions and non-prosecution agreements to CVF. Since it passed, the VOCA Fix Act has directed hundreds of millions of dollars into the CVF. However, the VOCA Fix Act still needs more time to fully replenish the fund. In the meantime, deposits into the CVF are still lower than before; therefore, VOCA continues to face cuts.
- ★ Congress and the Administration must act urgently to replenish the CVF fund or provide supplemental appropriations to VOCA to allow programs to continue to provide lifesaving services. Congress must provide level funding for VOCA (\$2 billion) in FY 24.

## **Invest in Key Programs via FY 24 Appropriations**

### ***Appropriations Subcommittees: Commerce Justice & Science (CJS), Labor, Health & Human Services (LHHS), and Transportation, Housing & Urban Development (THUD) (House and Senate)***

Funding core services, with a particular focus on shelter, housing, advocacy, legal assistance, culturally specific programs, and funding for tribes and tribal programs, has been and should continue to be a central way for Congress to ensure survivors have access to safety and justice. Additionally, Congress must invest in a comprehensive prevention strategy that reaches each state, territory, and tribe and invests in culturally specific programs. Congress must work to ensure that organizations led by and for Communities of Color have fair access to federal resources that address violence against women to provide culturally specific responses focused on their communities.

We urge Congress to provide significant investments for, and reject and proposed cuts to, domestic and sexual violence programs, with a specific priority on the programs below, described in [more detail here](#).

### **Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA): \$526 Million**

FVPSA funds emergency shelters, crisis lines, counseling, victim assistance, and other vital services for over one million domestic violence victims and their children each year (\$500M) and DELTA prevention grants work to stop violence before it starts (\$26M).

### **Culturally Specific Services Program (HHS Program): \$35 Million**

Survivors of color urgently need culturally relevant services that address domestic and sexual violence.

### **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA): \$1.14 Billion in Funding for Key Programs**

VAWA programs ensure that victims are safe and offenders are held accountable.

- ★ **Sexual Assault Services Program:** \$100M for rape crisis centers.
- ★ **Culturally specific program:** \$35M to provide services for survivors of color.
- ★ **Transitional Housing Program:** \$100M to house survivors and rebuild their lives.
- ★ **Legal Assistance for Victims:** \$100M to provide legal services to survivors.
- ★ **All VAWA DOJ programs:** \$805M for all VAWA programs

### **Domestic and Sexual Violence Housing Funds: \$90 Million**

An ongoing set-aside in the HUD Continuum of Care program allows communities to provide targeted housing and assistance for survivors facing homelessness and

additional technical assistance and implementation funds help ensure survivors' needs are met across HUD programs.

### **Funding to Support Immigrant Survivors: \$15 Million**

U visas and VAWA self-petitions are critical for victims to escape and overcome abuse. Congress must invest in resources to reduce a processing backlog that endangers survivors.

## **Reauthorize FVPSA: Expand & Build Upon Core Domestic Violence Legislation**

### ***Committees: Senate HELP / House Ed & Workforce***

- ★ Reauthorize the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act](#) with no rollbacks of current protections and key enhancements including:
  - Dedicated funding for tribal coalitions, culturally specific service providers, and substantially increased funding.
  - An [expanded Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances \(DELTA\) prevention program](#) to build the capacity of domestic violence coalitions in every state, territory, and in tribes, as well as provide targeted funding to culturally specific programs.

## **Advance Access to Safe, Affordable Housing for Survivors**

### ***Committees: Senate Banking Housing & Urban Affairs / House Financial Services, THUD Appropriations (House and Senate)***

Domestic violence and sexual assault are key drivers of homelessness for women, children and in particular for Women of Color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Survivors need access to housing options, including enhanced legal protections and bolstered access to a full spectrum of service-rich, DV housing-first (DVHF) focused options including, services and advocacy, emergency shelter and assistance, flexible funding, vouchers, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent housing subsidies, home-ownership assistance, as well as protections against housing discrimination. Congress must expand upon and support the legislation below in order to ensure survivors can flee or maintain housing to remain safe from abuse.

- ★ Introduce, build upon, expand, and pass legislation that improves survivor access housing resources by supporting access to funds for victim service providers who provide trauma-informed, confidential, and safe housing options for survivors.
- ★ Introduce and pass the [Fair Housing for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors Act of 2023](#), which would give HUD and the DOJ clear and direct

authority to protect survivors from housing discrimination in the private rental market, and the [Preventing Sexual Harassment in Public Housing Act](#), which would compel the federal government to ensure reporting and investigations of housing-related discrimination and harassment, particularly sexual harassment.

- ★ Introduce and pass legislation that protects tenants from unfair eviction screening policies that disproportionately affect Women of Color, such as previous evictions, credit history, and criminal background checks.
- ★ Expand rental assistance to all eligible households; expand and preserve supply of affordable rental homes, increase availability of emergency rental assistance to households in crisis, strengthen and enforce renter protections, especially survivor specific protections.<sup>i</sup>

## **Promote Economic Justice & Financial Security for Survivors**

***Committees: Senate HELP / House Ed & Workforce and Senate Finance / House Ways & Means***

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the nation's response to it, have laid bare the severe economic disparities in this country. Survivors need job security, employment protections, access to non-traditional and high paying jobs, and barrier-free access to cash, utility, and food assistance because of job insecurity (often caused by harassment and stalking by abusers). Addressing economic conditions and social conditions can reduce risks of domestic violence perpetration and victimization.<sup>ii</sup> We urge Congress to increase protections and options for survivors, in the following ways:

- ★ Revise and expand safety net protections for survivors, such as low-barrier direct cash and food assistance and improving access to Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit;<sup>iii</sup>
- ★ Pass federal labor and employment protections legislation including:<sup>iv</sup>
  - [Paycheck Fairness Act](#): provides updates to the Equal Pay Act of 1963 that modernize and strengthen tools to help close the gender wage gap;
  - [Raise the Wage Act](#): incrementally raises the federal minimum wage to \$15;
  - The [Job Protection Act](#) would improve and strengthen the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), by closing gaps in existing law and covering more individuals and families;
  - [The FAMILY Act](#): provides workers paid time off after the birth of a child, during an illness, or while caring for ill family members and entitles all workers to paid family and medical leave provided under FMLA.

- [The Healthy Families Act](#): provides paid sick and safe days to enable survivors to attend court proceedings, meet with lawyers and advocates, obtain services from a domestic violence or sexual assault program, and recover from or seek medical care for physical and/or psychological injuries due to the violence perpetrated against them;
- The [PRO Act](#): would expand labor protections and allow workers to collectively bargain for fair wages, adequate benefits, and safe working conditions;
- Employment anti-discrimination measures to prohibit survivors from being treated differently, fired, or not hired because they are experiencing or have experienced domestic or sexual violence; and
- Requirements for states to include leaving employment for reasons relating to domestic/sexual violence on their “good cause” list for unemployment insurance.

## **Advance Reproductive Justice & Health Care—including Abortion Care—for Survivors**

***Committees: Judiciary (House and Senate), Senate HELP, House Ways & Means, and House Energy & Commerce***

All people have the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent children in safe and sustainable communities.<sup>v</sup> For survivors, abusers often take away their fundamental right to sexual and reproductive decisions and bodily autonomy as a means of control and keeping them in abusive relationships. Survivors often face reproductive coercion and access to contraception and abortion services are essential health care and often a matter of safety. All people, including survivors, deserve full control over their lives and decisions, including the ability to safely and freely decide whether or not to become, or stay, pregnant. We urge Congress to:

- ★ Pass the [Women’s Health Protection Act](#)<sup>vi</sup> to create a federal law protecting abortion access from bans and restrictions nationwide;
- ★ Pass the [EACH Act](#) to repeal the Hyde Amendment and lift abortion coverage restrictions for those who depend on Medicaid and other government-sponsored plans;
- ★ Pass the [Abortion Justice Act](#) would protect people’s right to make their own health care decisions about abortion, and would improve availability and affordability of abortion care;

- ★ Pass the Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights (HER) Act to permanently end the global gag rule; and
- ★ Reject bills that limit reproductive and bodily autonomy.

## **Reduce Domestic Violence Homicides & Community Violence**

### ***Committees: Judiciary (House and Senate)***

Domestic violence and firearms are a deadly combination. Federal law provides critical protections to victims and survivors of domestic violence by restricting certain adjudicated abusers' firearm access but must be strengthened to cover all abusive situations, including dating relationships. We urge Congress to:

- ★ Pass the [Strengthening Protections for Domestic Violence and Stalking Survivors Act of 2023](#) to address existing loopholes that make it easy for perpetrators of dating violence and those convicted of misdemeanor stalking to legally access guns; and
- ★ Ensure the federal government fully implements the laws and provides resources for state and community implementation, so abusers cannot evade the restrictions and illegally possess firearms they use to threaten and murder their victims.
- ★ Support legislation that reinstates a federal ban on assault rifles to keep these lethal weapons from the hands of abusers and save and protect the lives of survivors.

## **Criminal Legal & Other System Reform**

### ***Committees: Judiciary Senate HELP / House Ed & Labor and Senate Finance / House Ways & Means***

The criminal legal system and other systems have routinely failed survivors of color and other survivors who face oppression and are marginalized. Not all survivors feel safe interacting with law enforcement; therefore, it is important for us to invest in non-carceral approaches to addressing domestic violence. In order to ensure that all survivors, especially survivors of color, can access safety, justice, and economic stability, we call on Congress to:

- ★ Support legislation that removes barriers within the criminal legal system that prevent access to safety, justice, and services for Communities of Color; create meaningful alternatives to the existing system; and reduce the number of incarcerated survivors.
- ★ Take meaningful steps to address other systems such as child welfare,

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and public housing, following the guidance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders in the domestic violence and sexual assault fields.

## **Protect Immigrant Survivors of Violence**

Abusers often exploit survivors' immigration status to further isolate or abuse them. The immigration system should prioritize the safety and autonomy of immigrant survivors.

Yet, persistent gaps in the law deny immigrant survivors access to safety and justice. NNEDV calls on Congress to pass [WISE Act](#), which would:

- ★ Strengthen survivor-based protections, including the U visa program;
- ★ Safeguard abused dependent spouses and children, including their confidentiality and privacy;
- ★ Support survivor self-sufficiency and remove vulnerabilities to further victimization; and
- ★ Prevent detention and removal of victims and encourage them to seek protection, including limiting immigration enforcement in protected areas.

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<sup>i</sup> Summarized from the HoUSed Campaign [HoUSed | National Low Income Housing Coalition \(nlihc.org\)](https://www.housed.org/), [HoUSed Campaign Sign on letter](#).

<sup>ii</sup> Niolon, P., Kearns M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> Federal Safety Net programs include:

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) – including enhancing Family Violence Option (FVO) waivers and access for immigrant survivors;
- Child support;
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI);
- Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credits;
- Additional tax credits to low and moderate working families and individuals; and
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (by boosting the maximum allowable and eliminating time limits and other barriers).

<sup>iv</sup> See the bills introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress - Paycheck Fairness Act ([H.R. 7/S. 205](#)) Raise the Wage Act ([H.R. 603/S. 53](#)), [The FAMILY Act](#) ([H.R. 804 / S. 248](#)), Healthy Families Act ([H.R. 2465/S. 1195](#))

<sup>v</sup> See SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective definition of Reproductive Justice at <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

<sup>vi</sup> See Women's Protection Act of 2022 ([H.R. 8296/S. 4132](#)) introduced in 117<sup>th</sup> Congress