

Family Violence Prevention Fund

An Agenda for Action to End Violence Against Women and Children: Recommendations for the Department of Justice

The physical and sexual abuse of women and children remains a criminal justice and public health problem in the United States. At least one in four women will be abused at some point in her life, and more than 15 million children witness this abuse every year. About 1,200 women are murdered each year by current or former partners, and almost 500 women and girls are raped or sexually assaulted each day in the United States. Despite the enormous progress that has been made over the last 30 years, domestic and sexual violence remain an urgent crisis in our midst.

While we tend to focus on the dramatic cases of children abducted from schools or playgrounds, far more often it is intimate partners who perpetrate the most extreme and horrific acts of violence on those closest to them. It is this “original sin” that often begins a young person’s desperate journey down a path of school failure, involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, substance abuse, injury and ultimately incarceration or even homicide.

Most importantly, it can be prevented. Central to addressing violence against women and children, is the need to prevent and intervene early in families where we see violence and begin to shift away from the over-reliance on incarceration. Our criminal justice response must remain strong, but as we move forward in a new Administration and into difficult fiscal times we must utilize the least expensive and most effective means of combating crime: prevention.

Specifically, we recommend the Attorney General and Department of Justice:

Focus on Primary Prevention that Engages Men and Boys

We must teach boys early that violence against women and girls does not equal strength and provide supports throughout their lives to reinforce those messages.

- Use Father’s Day as a National Day of Reflection on fatherhood and raising boys into men. Building on the President-elect’s Father’s Day speech, convene a day-long meeting on successful programs and efforts to teach boys about healthy relationships. Highlight successful responsible fatherhood programs that empower men and support them in their roles as nonviolent parents and partners.
- Fully fund the Engaging Men and Boys program within the *Violence Against Women Act*.

Increase Services for Children Exposed to Violence and Teen Victims

Resources must be targeted where they can have the largest impact, which is help for children and youth who have witnessed or experienced violence or abuse.

- Convene a White House Conference on Successful Strategies to Help Children Exposed to Violence.

- Reinvigorate the Safe Start Program within OJJDP to create coordinated community responses to children exposed to violence. Use the White House Conference to identify lessons learned and promising practices from the last decade of this work.
- Fully fund the Services for Children Exposed to Violence program with the *Violence Against Women Act*.
- Fully fund the *Violence Against Women Act* teen dating violence programs.

Maintain Funding for Victim Services

As we increase our attention on prevention and early intervention we must still maintain services for victims.

- Fully fund the Sexual Assault Services Program and other victim-services programs within the *Violence Against Women Act*, including legal services for victims and judicial training.
- Lift the cap on the *Victims of Crime Act* fund to allow disbursement of existing funds to victims of crime and victim-serving organizations.

Address Family Violence Experienced by Military Personnel/Veterans

Our military families are already seeing increased rates of suicide, family violence and homicide. These numbers will likely increase as more veterans return home. To address this, the DOD, VA and DOJ should follow through on recommendations included in recent reports on domestic violence and sexual assault in the military and the recent RAND report on PTSD and suicide. Though most of our recommendations specifically target the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, the Office on Violence Against Women has a critical role to play in advising, coordinating and training those who provide services and administer justice on military bases and within military families.

- Ensure that partners of active-duty personnel and veterans are informed about and have access to domestic violence and sexual assault services within the civilian community.
- Request additional discretionary funding for OVW to begin pilot projects in collaboration with DOD on addressing domestic and sexual violence in the military, including prevention programs, services for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

Address the Particular Challenges Faced by Immigrant and Refugee Victims

The *Violence Against Women Act* includes many vital protections for immigrant victims of violence and trafficking, however services remain inadequate to address the complex needs of these victims, including language barriers, social isolation, anti-immigrant zealotry and poorly designed services.

- As immigration reform takes place ensure that the protections for immigrant victims of violence are maintained and strengthened.
- The Public Education campaign(s) targeting culturally-specific communities authorized in the *Violence Against Women Act* should be funded.

For additional information, please contact Kiersten Stewart at the Family Violence Prevention Fund, 202-682-1212, or visit www.endabuse.org.