

6-12-00
VHWA Reauthorization
Event

**Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Event
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Presidential Hall
The White House
June 12, 2000**

[Some opening remarks were cut off the tape.]

...in Pittsburgh because the weather prevented her from getting any further, so she drove and got here in the middle of the night, so I am very appreciative. I am delighted also that we have so many members of Congress here, and I'd like to ask all of the members to stand so that we can acknowledge them. I know that the front row is filled with members.

We are here today to send a clear message: If we want to stop violence against women, protect its victims, and prosecute those responsible, then we must reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act now.

There didn't used to be events like this, in the White House or really anywhere else in our country. The words domestic violence used to be whispered by only a few brave activists and survivors. So I am especially pleased as I look around this Presidential Hall today and see so many leaders from law enforcement, government, and non-profits who have worked tirelessly to ensure that no woman falls victim to violence, and if it does occur, the perpetrators are prosecuted and punished.

I want to thank Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala and Bonnie Campbell, the director of our Violence Against Women's Office, for helping to lead the Administration's efforts on this issue. I also want to say a special word of appreciation to Senator Barbara Boxer and Congresswoman Connie Morella, who, along with Joe Biden and John Conyers, are working tirelessly in Congress to reauthorize this act. And I want to thank them and the Members who are here with us today for their leadership, speaking out on the floor and in committees to protect women from abuse and assault.

Violence against women is not just a women's issue. It's a family issue -- and a criminal issue. And as you can see from the members of the law enforcement community who are behind me and in the audience, law enforcement knows how important this issue is in keeping the peace in families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Sheriff Kathy Witt of Fayette County, Kentucky, used VAWA funds to create a "zero tolerance" unit which serves emergency protective orders on batterers within 12 hours after they are issued -- when women are most vulnerable. We will also hear from the attorney general from the state of Maryland, Joseph Curran, who has championed VAWA by creating a statewide Family Violence Council to improve the way Maryland responds to violence against women. And, finally, we will hear from Rose Pulliam, the associate director of the Alabama Coalition of

Domestic Violence, who has teamed up with law enforcement to better serve victims of violence at the local level.

We know that violence against women is an equal opportunity destroyer – it plagues women of all ages and backgrounds, all races and religions, all communities and countries. Last week, I joined women from all over the world at the United Nations to celebrate the strides we have made since the Beijing Conference five years ago. We recommitted ourselves to ensuring that the issues that were most important to women were kept on the global agenda, and again and again the issue of domestic violence was raised. We as a country could, at that meeting, report that we have made real progress in our fight against violence against women. We know that there are many women who today are alive and are leading lives that are looking toward the future because we had programs to intervene, to prevent, and to punish.

I remember as a young lawyer so often encountering women who had been abused and had been neglected by the legal system, who felt that their bodily damage, the damage to their spirit, the way their belief in themselves, their future had been crushed, was something that no one else cared about. Often times they were ridiculed and ignored when they went for help. Neither the police, nor the legal system, nor the medical system really treated domestic violence as a crime. But that has changed, and we now know that finally, the incidence of domestic violence is going down.

The Justice Department recently released a report showing that, from 1993 to 1998, domestic violence declined by 21 percent. In fact, intimate partners committed fewer murders in 1996, 1997, and 1998 than in any other year since 1976.

I believe that there are many reasons why that is the case. But certainly among one of the most important reasons is the Violence Against Women Act and the concerted effort that public education and outreach that this legislation helped us organize around in the last years. Today, I am releasing two new government reports that show how VAWA has helped us increase resources, change attitudes, and make critical strides to combat domestic violence.

VAWA has meant \$1.5 billion in more funding for local organizations and law enforcement offices all over the country. It has provided shelter to more than 300,000 battered women and children. It has given nearly 500,000 domestic violence victims a toll-free national hotline to call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. And it has helped thousands of police officers, judges, and state prosecutors to better serve the domestic violence victims.

I am pleased to be joined today by police officers from domestic violence units in Maryland and Virginia who are standing behind me, as well as representatives of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Police Executive Research Forum, the National Association of Attorneys General, the National Sheriffs Association, and the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. Every one of these people and countless others like them across our country have worked to make this promise against violence a reality for women and children.

Today a police officer who receives a call from a woman being abused at home is much more likely to know how to respond. A police department or D.A.'s office is more likely to have people specializing in domestic violence and sexual assault cases.

Law enforcement is more likely to forge partnerships with social service providers to serve victims more effectively. I heard recently about a community that created a mobile unit to provide direct assistance to victims in rural areas. But we can not claim victory because every day we know that this problem is stalking women everywhere.

Nearly one-third of women murdered each year in America are still killed by their intimate partners. One million women are stalked each year. And when women were still raped and sexually assaulted more than 300,000 times in 1998 alone, our job is far from done. I don't believe law enforcement yet has the resources needed to track down and to punish those who hurt women with the full force of the law.

For centuries, domestic violence women suffered in silence. Now that is no longer the case, but we can not permit our country to take a step back. We must reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, so that the message goes out loudly and clearly. Make no mistake about it, this is still a national priority that we intend to keep focusing on and pushing until we see that every woman has the protection she needs and law enforcement has the resources they require and protective orders actually protect women.

We also have to guarantee that children in abusive homes have much more help than traditionally has been available. You know, witnessing domestic violence and being abused, for males, is the single biggest predictor of juvenile delinquency and adult criminality.

The Vice President today is sending a letter to every member of Congress today asking them to make reauthorizing VAWA a priority.

We know this is a priority for law enforcement. It is a priority for the members of Congress who joined us today. It's a priority for this Administration, the President, the Vice President, and me. It's a priority for the U.S. Conference of Mayors. But most importantly, it is a priority for women and children. Now, it is time for Congress to act.

We cannot fail to reauthorize this act, because to do so would be to fail the women who are being hurt every day by loved ones and strangers.

It is my great honor now to introduce someone who has been a strong champion of this legislation, who has worked very hard on behalf of women and children, and who has been a relentless champion of making sure that Congress puts the needs of women and children first — Senator Barbara Boxer.

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