

April 19, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

As mayors who collectively represent over seven and a half million women, we believe it is imperative that the Senate pass S. 1925, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011. Despite considerable progress over the past two decades in addressing the epidemic of violence against women, we recognize that much more needs to be done and that this legislation will strengthen our national commitment to tackling the challenges that remain.

Since 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has provided a comprehensive, coordinated, and community-based approach toward reducing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other forms of violence. Over the past two decades, its programs and services have provided lifesaving assistance to hundreds of thousands of victims. Through victim support programs, local and state funding assistance, and the U Visa program, VAWA has strengthened the ability of the criminal justice system to investigate and prosecute crimes and hold violent perpetrators accountable. These efforts have contributed to dramatic reductions in the incidence and impact of violence against women, including an over 50 percent decline in the annual rate of domestic violence. As we seek to make further progress, we believe it is essential that we provide services to victims regardless of their gender, race, language, immigration status, or sexual orientation.


As mayors, we have seen the tremendous positive impact of the Violence Against Women Act in our communities. In New York, VAWA funding has helped open three Family Justice Centers, which are one-stop domestic violence centers with staff from government agencies and nonprofit organizations to assist victims of domestic violence. In Los Angeles, VAWA funding has also helped expand its Domestic Abuse Response Team—a collaborative effort between law enforcement officers and victim

advocates to respond to domestic violence calls at the scene of the crime and provide crisis intervention. The Chicago Police Department uses its funding to train staff to assist victims of domestic abuse in an effort to provide the best resources to these victims. These are just a few examples of the vital services and assistance that this landmark law has enabled communities all over the country to provide to combat this terrible problem.

Despite the progress that has been made, much more needs to be done. Still today, nearly one in five women have been sexually assaulted or raped in their lifetime, and 45 percent of the women killed in the United States die at the hands of an intimate partner. This level of violence is simply unacceptable. We believe that S. 1925—like the 2000 and 2005 reauthorizations that preceded it—will help us better address continuing problems and remaining unmet needs. This legislation will expand services to immigrant and lesbian, gay, and transgendered communities, who not only experience the highest rates of violence but often have the most difficulty in accessing services. In recognition of the persistent problem of sexual violence, S. 1925 also will strengthen the capacity of local, state, and federal law enforcement to investigate and prosecute these crimes. While these tools will be essential in achieving justice, they are also a reminder of the wide impact that domestic violence has on the community at large including law enforcement. In each of our cities, police officers have been injured or murdered while responding to domestic violence incidents.

For these reasons, we believe that it is critical that the Senate move quickly to take up and pass S. 1925 in order to strengthen our national commitment to all victims of domestic violence.

Sincerely,



Rahm Emanuel
Mayor, City of Chicago



Antonio R. Villaraigosa
Mayor, City of Los Angeles



Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor, City of New York
