



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF
CATHERINE PIERCE
ACTING DIRECTOR
OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

HEARING ENTITLED
“THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF THE VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN ACT”

PRESENTED

JUNE 10, 2009

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Leahy, Senator Sessions, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Catherine Pierce, and I am the Acting Director of the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). I am here today to discuss both the great strides forward that we have made in the fifteen years since the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was enacted and the many challenges that still lie ahead of us in our efforts to combat violence against women.

Support for Community Efforts to End Violence Against Women

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) administers financial support and technical assistance to communities across the country that are creating programs, policies, and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. Our mission is to provide national leadership to improve the Nation's response to these crimes through the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, the Violence Against Women Act of 2000, and the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. OVW pursues this mission by supporting community efforts, enhancing education and training, disseminating promising practices, launching special initiatives, and leading the Nation's efforts to end violence against women.

OVW's grant programs fund a broad spectrum of activities designed to serve victims and hold offenders accountable. At present, OVW administers two formula grant programs and 17 discretionary grant programs, all of which were established under VAWA and subsequent legislation. These grant programs fund States, local governments, tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations to help communities across America develop innovative strategies to respond to violence against women. With our funding, communities are forging effective partnerships among Federal, State, local and tribal governments, and between the criminal justice system and victim advocates, and are providing much-needed services to victims. Taken together, these programs address a host of different issues that communities face in responding to violence against women, including: the importance of training police, prosecutors, and court personnel; the unique barriers faced by rural communities; the critical need of victims for legal assistance, transitional housing, and supervised visitation services; the special needs of elderly victims and those with disabilities; and the high rate of violence against women in Indian country.

Since 1995, OVW has made grant awards and cooperative agreements totaling over \$3.5 billion to communities across the United States.

Every day, VAWA funding makes a difference in how communities across America help victims and hold offenders accountable. For example, in the six-month reporting period from January to June 2008 alone, OVW discretionary program grantees reported that:

- Nearly 115,500 victims were served;
- More than 228,000 services (including shelter, civil legal assistance and crisis intervention) were provided to victims;
- More than 3,500 individuals were arrested for violation of protection orders; and
- 261,622 protection orders were granted in jurisdictions that receive funding from OVW's Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program (Arrest Program).

In addition, subgrantees receiving funding awarded by States through OVW's STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grant Program (STOP Program) reported that, in calendar year 2007:

- More than 505,000 victims were served;
- Over 1,201,000 services were provided to victims; and
- More than 4,700 individuals were arrested for violations of protection orders.

These funds not only help the victims who receive services; they are used by OVW grantees to change the way that our criminal justice system responds to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Again, the raw numbers show the far reach of VAWA funding:

- During the three-and-a-half year period from January 2005, through June 2008, OVW's grantees reported training nearly 875,000 individuals, including 142,339 law enforcement officers, 15,380 prosecutors, and 24,159 court personnel.
- During the four-year period of 2004 through 2007 combined, STOP subgrantees reported training about 1,138,000 individuals, including 347,382 law enforcement officers, 25,715 prosecutors, and 37,775 court personnel.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

We cannot discuss the victims who have been helped with VAWA funds without recognizing the work of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which was created with funding first authorized by VAWA in 1994 and is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Today, the trained advocates who staff this toll-free hotline answer an average of 21,000 calls a month from victims and their friends and families nationwide. These advocates not only provide immediate crisis counseling but can connect victims with service providers in their local communities.

The Coordinated Community Response

One of the signature achievements of OVW's grant programs is the re-envisioning of the concept of a coordinated community response. When OVW implemented its first VAWA programs, our vision for a successful coordinated community response focused on improving the criminal justice response. We encouraged grantees to bring together law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and non-profit, non-

governmental victim advocates to share their experience and use their distinct roles to improve a community-defined response to violence against women. We now recognize that truly effective coordinated community responses must be informed by the experiences of survivors and must be broad enough to include a diverse group of community partners that affect the safety of survivors and the accountability of perpetrators. Community partners should include health care providers, cultural groups, and neighborhood organizations, as well as the criminal and civil justice systems and housing and homeless organizations. This expanded view recognizes that many victims do not report to law enforcement or do not choose to pursue a criminal justice-based response.

In the years since VAWA's enactment, we have witnessed a sea-change in the way that communities respond to violence against women. Communities recognize the specialized needs of victims and the training required to effectively handle domestic violence and sexual assault cases. As a result, dedicated units of law enforcement officers and prosecutors have grown far more common – often with the support of VAWA funds. We have also witnessed and supported the growth of dedicated dockets and courts. Further, we have worked to ensure that communities have opportunities to test innovative practices.

Expanding Nationwide Training, Education, and Promising Practices Regarding Violence Against Women

Training and technical assistance ensure that professionals have the tools to respond effectively to these crimes. We must continue to support high quality education and training on an ongoing basis, given the high rate of turnover and burn out in this work. OVW works closely with national experts to train, educate, and disseminate promising practices to advocates, clinicians, police, prosecutors, judges, health care practitioners, and many other professionals who are on the front lines. The following six areas of focus illustrate how OVW uses technical assistance funding to support the work of the field.

1. Developing Resources to Support the Issuance and Enforcement of Protection Orders

Protection orders play a crucial role in affording a safety umbrella to victims escaping violence. Since the passage of VAWA, OVW has undertaken a number of activities to assist jurisdictions and professionals with issuing and enforcing protection orders. Of particular note, in 1997, the National Center for Full Faith and Credit (NCFCC) was created with OVW funding to respond to the mandate in VAWA that States and tribes enforce protection orders issued by other jurisdictions. NCFCC trains law enforcement officers and judges, provides onsite technical assistance to jurisdictions, and tracks State protection order legislation and forms. Since 2005, NCFCC has trained more than 5,300 professionals. To further support jurisdictions, in 2005, with funding from OVW, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) issued "A Guide for Effective Issuance & Enforcement of Protection Orders." This publication,

known as the Burgundy Book, was developed to give communities and professionals the tools and strategies to strengthen the effectiveness of protection orders. More than 7,600 copies of the book have been provided to professionals working in the domestic violence field. Finally, the National Center for State Courts, with OVW funding, established "Project Passport" to encourage courts to issue uniform protection orders and thereby enhance nationwide enforcement. Through Project Passport, six of eight regions nationally have held meetings to promote the adoption of uniform protection order coversheets; 32 States and the District of Columbia have adopted such coversheets.

2. Improving Judicial Response to Violence Against Women Through Judicial Institutes

During the 1990s, as law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and other system-based professionals moved to improve their response to domestic violence, the judiciary's response remained relatively stagnant. OVW therefore launched a significant effort to improve the ways courts respond to domestic and sexual violence. Beginning in 1995, OVW has provided support to Legal Momentum, which instituted the National Judicial Education Program (NJEP) to improve the handling of sexual assault cases in courts nationwide by providing training and training materials for judges, prosecutors, and multidisciplinary audiences. Beginning in 1998, and continuing to the present, OVW has worked closely with the NCJFCJ and the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPPF) to develop the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence (NJIDV).

With OVW funding, both NJEP and NJIDV have designed highly interactive, effective education programming to enhance judicial skills and challenge judges' attitudes and values about domestic and sexual violence, victims, and perpetrators. To date, NJIDV alone has trained more than 7,500 judges from all 50 States, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

3. Improving the Response of Prosecutors to Sexual and Domestic Violence

OVW also has promoted targeted training for prosecutors to improve their ability to handle both sexual and domestic violence cases. With OVW funding, the American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI), in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and the Battered Women's Justice Project, has developed national institutes to provide intensive training for prosecutors. From 2005 through 2008, APRI trained 780 participants at 15 domestic violence courses and 282 participants at seven sexual violence courses.

4. Supporting the Work of Victim Advocates

OVW and its grantees rely heavily on engaging victim advocates and using their knowledge and expertise as part of a coordinated community response to violence against women. Our work could not be done without the enormous dedication and lifesaving work of victim advocates and advocacy organizations. As we have learned more about the need to provide more comprehensive services for victims (including safety planning),

we must strengthen advocates' skills, knowledge and abilities so that they are well prepared to continue their important work. Therefore, OVW is working to strengthen advocacy throughout the country. In Fiscal Year 2006, OVW awarded a two-year planning grant to develop an Advocacy Learning Center for OVW grantees. The project has brought together advocates who work with victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, trafficking, and sexual exploitation, victims with disabilities and those abused in later life, and advocates working in criminal, civil, family, and tribal courts to design a two-year course for victim advocacy programs.

5. Improving the Response of Criminal Justice Professionals and Health Care Practitioners to Sexual Assault Victims

Since the passage of VAWA 2000, OVW has undertaken a coordinated series of projects to encourage communities to provide medical forensic examinations to sexual assault victims that will address victim concerns, minimize trauma, promote healing and increase the likelihood of successful prosecutions. First, in September, 2004, the Attorney General released *A National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations (Adults/Adolescents)* (the SAFE Protocol), which provides detailed guidelines for criminal justice and health care practitioners in responding to the immediate needs of sexual assault victims. OVW developed the Protocol after extensive consultation with national, State, tribal, and local experts in the field. OVW is currently reviewing the Protocol in its entirety and considering how to update it to reflect developments in law and practice since its issuance. Second, as a companion to the SAFE Protocol, in 2006 OVW issued national training standards for sexual assault forensic examiners. These standards include recommendations on training objectives and topics to help communities establish or enhance training programs for forensic examiners. Third, OVW funds the SAFE Technical Assistance Project, an ongoing collaboration with the International Association of Forensic Nurses that provides training and technical assistance to support communities implementing the SAFE Protocol. Finally, in October 2007, OVW, in partnership with the National Institute of Justice, released a virtual practicum based on the SAFE Protocol. This interactive program provides expert instruction for healthcare professionals who may treat sexual assault patients and be called to testify about that care.

6. Developing National Elder Abuse Training Curricula

Older individuals who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking face additional challenges in accessing services. Appropriate interventions may be compromised by misconceptions that older persons are not victims, and age may increase the isolation of these victims and their dependence on abusers. To respond to the great need for training in this area, OVW has worked with the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life and national organizations with expertise in training criminal justice professionals to create four, targeted curricula that focus on elder abuse: a law enforcement curriculum, law enforcement "training of trainers" component, prosecutors curriculum, and judges curriculum.

Launching Demonstration Projects and Special Initiatives

OVW has launched a number of demonstration projects and special initiatives that test promising practices, address areas of special need, and build capacity in communities. We also have worked with our Federal partners to widen our understanding of the prevalence and nature of violence against women. Our groundbreaking projects – new and old – include:

1. Judicial Oversight Demonstration Initiative

In 1999, the Judicial Oversight Demonstration (JOD) Initiative, which was jointly funded and managed by OVW and the National Institute of Justice, tested the idea that a coordinated community response to domestic violence that ensures a focused judicial response and a systematic criminal justice response can improve victim safety and service provision, as well as increase offender accountability. Having completed the initiative in 2004, several promising practices from the JOD Initiative have emerged, including enhancing safety and accountability during the pretrial phase and after conviction, reducing language and cultural barriers to effective interventions, solving problems by working together and overcoming longstanding habits and institutional barriers. Most important, the Initiative determined that frequent judicial oversight of domestic violence offenders reduced the degree and frequency of violence experienced by victims.

2. Stalking Victimization in the United States Special Report

In January of this year, the Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics released the *Stalking Victimization in the United States Special Report*. The Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) was specifically developed, with funding from OVW, to provide national-level data on the crime of stalking. The SVS represents the largest study of stalking conducted to date and incorporated elements in Federal and State laws to construct a definition of stalking.

This report confirms what the field has long known: stalking is pervasive, women are at higher risk of being stalked, and there is a dangerous intersection between stalking and more violent crimes. Key findings of the report include:

- During the 12-month period covered by the SVS, an estimated 3.4 million persons age 18 or older were victims of stalking.
- Females experienced 20 stalking victimizations per 1,000 females age 18 or older.
- The rate of stalking victimizations for males was approximately 7 per 1,000 males age 18 or older.
- Persons age 18 to 19 and 20 to 24 experienced the highest rates of stalking victimization.
- One in 7 victims reported they moved as a result of the stalking.
- Approximately 60 percent do not report victimization to the police.

OVW will use the *Special Report* to guide its development of future grant solicitations, trainings, and technical assistance as we work with our grantees and partners in responding to this crime.

3. Teen Dating Violence Projects

As the Nation's understanding of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking has increased, so too has our awareness that these forms of violence affect all age groups and that violence within relationships often begins during adolescence. OVW has made raising awareness and understanding of teen dating violence a priority. At the same time, we realize that many organizations that have traditionally – and successfully – served victims of domestic violence have little experience addressing the unique needs of teen dating violence victims. Therefore, we have undertaken a three-pronged strategy to reach teen dating violence victims, encourage them to seek help, and build the capacity of our grantees to serve them. First, in 2007, OVW made an award to the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline to help make vital resources accessible to help teens experiencing dating violence and to offer tips on preventing abusive relationships. From February of that year until October, 2008, the Helpline reported receiving 18,736 calls and online contacts. Second, in 2007, OVW joined with the FVPF, the Ad Council and R/GA, an interactive agency, to develop a teen dating violence awareness campaign/initiative. The campaign, launched in January of this year, focuses on the use of technology as a means of reaching 13-16 year olds and addresses "digital infractions" that can be forms of abusive and controlling behavior. Third, in 2007, OVW funded Break the Cycle to provide training and technical assistance to our STOP Program subgrantees so that they have the resources and knowledge needed to serve teen victims of violence.

4. Outreach to the Deaf Community

In an effort to address violence against Deaf victims, OVW and the Vera Institute of Justice convened two focus groups with Deaf leaders, Deaf advocates and allies in 2006 and 2007. Participants agreed that culturally Deaf organizations are best able to serve Deaf victims, but that few such organizations exist, and many of those are struggling to meet the demand for services. As a result, OVW created a special initiative to establish new culturally Deaf organizations and Deaf programs within established domestic violence and/or sexual assault programs. OVW awarded a two-year cooperative agreement to the Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services in Seattle, WA to provide intensive training and technical assistance to 28 cities that are interested in establishing culturally Deaf organizations or Deaf programs within an established domestic violence and/or sexual assault program. We anticipate that 28 culturally Deaf organizations and programs will be established through this special initiative.

5. Military-Civilian Coordinated Community Response Demonstration Project

In domestic violence cases involving military personnel and their families, a lack of coordination between civilian and military service providers and law enforcement may affect the quality of services that victims receive and whether perpetrators are held

accountable. OVW has funded the Battered Women's Justice Project to enhance collaboration between civilian and military agencies at two demonstration locations, Jacksonville, FL, and Fort Campbell, KY. Our goal for this ongoing project is to produce a model for military-civilian cooperation that other communities can replicate. During calendar year 2008, the project has trained more than 300 people, including military and civilian advocates, military and civilian law enforcement officers, Judge Advocates General, civilian attorneys, and military staff and commanders.

While we are rightly proud of our accomplishments over the past fifteen years, we recognize that there is much for us to do in the future. Looking forward, the Office will focus on a number of areas where we know that greater effort is needed. We also plan to enhance our partnership with the National Institute of Justice to ensure that research informs practice and that practice informs research.

Building on Our Response to Violence Against Indian Women

OVW has long focused on the enhancing the capacity of Tribal governments to respond to violence against Indian women. In VAWA 2005, Congress directed OVW to take new steps to address the critical problem of violence against women in Indian country. Since then, OVW has responded to this Congressional mandate with a series of initiatives and internal structural reforms. First, the Department appointed a Deputy Director for Tribal Affairs for OVW, who oversees a staff of four grant program specialists, coordinates implementation of Title IX of VAWA 2005, and meets with tribal leaders nationwide to gain a more intimate understanding of the needs and challenges that tribes face. Together, the Tribal Deputy and her staff have successfully developed and implemented the Grants to Indian Tribal Governments Program, which, in its first two years of operation, distributed nearly \$62 million to more than 140 tribal governments, tribal consortia and tribal nonprofit organizations to assist tribal communities. In total, the Office has awarded more than \$86 million to grant projects in Indian country, which currently reach approximately 325 of the Nation's 562 Indian Tribes. In the coming months, with the award of Recovery Act and Fiscal Year 2009 funding, we expect to broaden further our efforts in Indian Country.

We know that we must work in partnership with both Indian women and Tribal governments to find solutions. OVW has fostered the growth of nonprofit, tribal domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions to empower Indian women to take a more active role in leading the movement to end violence against Indian women. At Congress's direction, OVW has established a Federal advisory committee to provide advice and recommendations to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as NIJ conducts a program of research about the nature and dynamics of violence against Indian women. We look forward to the third Task Force meeting later this month on June 29 and 30. Also pursuant to Title IX, we have instituted annual tribal consultations to discuss how the Department of Justice can improve its response to violence against Indian women; to date, we have conducted three of these consultations attended by leaders from nearly 100 tribes, and we are currently planning our fourth for this fall. Finally, in September 2008,

we hosted a focus group with Federal officials and tribal advocates, leaders, and experts to discuss developing a national tribal sexual offender and protection order registry.

OVW also is working to ensure the victims of sexual assault in Indian Country have access to forensic exams. We currently are adapting the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations* to specifically address the needs of tribal communities. We hope to have a draft of the Tribal SAFE Protocol completed by late 2009. In addition, OVW is supporting a technical assistance project that will train lay advocates and paraprofessionals on collecting basic forensic evidence where SANE nurses do not exist for American Indian and Alaska Native victims.

Enhancing Sexual Assault Services

OVW and others have emphasized the importance of providing sexual assault forensic exams and processing physical evidence recovery kits (i.e., rape kits). Although such efforts are absolutely important, equally important services like advocacy services have received little attention or funding. Given that the overwhelming majority of sexual assault victims never make a report to law enforcement and may face a long recovery from trauma, these services are critical.

We are pleased to report that this year, for the first time, OVW will make awards under the Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP). Authorized in VAWA 2005, this program is the first Federal funding stream solely dedicated to the provision of direct intervention and related assistance for victims of sexual assault. SASP encompasses five different funding streams for States and territories, tribes, State sexual assault coalitions, tribal coalitions, and culturally specific organizations. Overall, the purpose of SASP is to provide intervention, advocacy, accompaniment, support services, and related assistance for adult, youth, and child victims of sexual assault, family and household members of victims, and those collaterally affected by the sexual assault.

Across the Nation, domestic violence programs (often called “dual” programs) provide the majority of sexual assault services. There are few stand-alone programs solely dedicated to the provision of sexual assault services. This is particularly true in rural areas of our country. While sexual assault certainly occurs within intimate relationships, sexual assault victims also include children, adults molested as children, and men and women assaulted by strangers and non-strangers, including friends, neighbors, co-workers, and casual acquaintances. A service provider must be prepared to meet the needs of all victims. Far too many dual programs, however, lack this preparation. To address this problem, OVW will soon announce a new Demonstration Project to increase the capacity of dual sexual assault/domestic violence programs to address and serve sexual violence survivors, increase access to underserved survivors and develop models of services that prioritize the needs of the survivors beyond immediate crisis responses and evaluate the effectiveness of the newly enhanced services.

Including Children and Youth

Adults are not the only ones affected by domestic violence; researchers estimate that between 10 percent and 20 percent of American children are exposed to adult domestic violence every year. A wide range of studies indicates that, on average, children who experience domestic violence exhibit higher levels of behavioral, social, and emotional problems than children who have not witnessed such violence.

Historically, OVW has primarily focused on holding offenders accountable and providing services to victims. VAWA 2005, however, created three new programs that will broaden of efforts to include children and youth who also suffer from the effects of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. As part of its Federal interagency collaboration, OVW is developing these programs in consultation with HHS.

First, OVW is developing the Children and Youth Exposed to Violence Grant Program, created by VAWA 2005, and plans to release a solicitation later this year. This program will fund projects that seek to mitigate the effects of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking on children and youth exposed to such violence and reduce the risk of future victimization or perpetration. It will also support projects that provide services for children, including direct counseling, advocacy, or mentoring.

Second, OVW is developing the new Services to Advocate and Respond to Youth Program. This grant program will fund projects that design and implement programs and services using established domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking intervention models to respond to the needs of youth who are victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. OVW will release a solicitation by the end of 2009.

Third, OVW is developing the Engaging Men and Youth Program, which will support local projects to prevent crimes of violence against women with the goal of developing mutually respectful, nonviolent relationships. This new program creates a unique opportunity for OVW to support projects that encourage children and youth to pursue nonviolent relationships and reduce their risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. We plan to release a solicitation for this program in 2010.

The complicated issue of child custody presents another challenge involving the intersection of children and domestic violence. Battered women losing custody of their children is a serious and growing problem. In August of 2008, OVW convened a Roundtable Discussion on Custody and Domestic Violence with experts and practitioners to inform OVW about how battered women are losing custody of their children to either the perpetrators (through Family Court) or to the State (through Child Protective Services). As a result of the Roundtable Discussion, OVW will be supporting a variety of projects: training for attorneys and judges; increased access to legal representation for victims of domestic violence; training for custody evaluators; the development of easily accessible resources and tools that will assist judges and others in making informed decisions around custody; and increased public awareness about how children are being

placed in the custody of batterers and how that is affecting those children. OVW will also increase collaboration with HHS to assist in developing better domestic violence practices for the child protection system.

Supporting Community- Defined Solutions

OVW feels strongly that the best response to violence against women – the response most likely to empower victims and hold offenders accountable – is a response that is driven and defined by the community served. Research indicates that survivors are more inclined to seek services from organizations that are familiar with their culture, language and background. Culturally specific community-based organizations are more likely to understand the obstacles that victims from their communities face when attempting to access services. These organizations also are better equipped to engage their communities. Whether they serve persons of communities of color, the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community, or the Deaf community, these organizations play a vital role in providing services that are relevant to their communities.

The Grants to Enhance Culturally and Linguistically Specific Services for Victims of Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking Program, authorized by VAWA 2005, creates a unique opportunity for targeted community-based organizations to address the critical needs of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking victims. OVW knows there is tremendous interest in this funding: in response to our Fiscal Year 2009 solicitation, we received 213 applications – far more than we could possibly fund. A significant number of these applications was received from organizations serving Latino communities. If funded, these organizations would serve Latina victims in their own language and with a deep understanding of the cultural and legal barriers they face when reporting crimes. We plan to make our first awards under this program in the fall.

Addressing Domestic Violence Homicide

OVW recognizes the need to focus future efforts on the prevention of domestic violence homicide. Research has identified several risk factors associated with increased danger for women in violent relationships. These include an abuser's threats to kill or harm her, himself, or their children; unemployment; forced sex; and the presence of a gun. Advocates, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and the courts must take aggressive steps to plan for a victim's safety when any combination of risk factors is present. By the time abuse escalates to homicide, we know that someone in the family, the neighborhood, or the perpetrator's or victim's workplace is aware that something is terribly wrong. OVW will continue to partner with other Federal agencies, the research community, criminal justice organizations, and advocacy groups to develop innovative responses with the hope and intention of preventing future domestic violence homicides.

Research indicates that a victim of domestic violence is more likely to suffer a fatal injury if a firearm is present in her home. For that reason, OVW has recently focused our efforts on the federal firearms provisions that prohibit firearms possession by

persons subject to qualified restraining orders and convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence. For example, in July 2008, we conducted a Washington Metropolitan Summit with Federal, State and local officials to discuss, among other things, effective tools to successfully prosecute domestic violence offenders and to forfeit those firearms involved in domestic violence offenses. In September 2006, we brought together Federal, State, Tribal, and local teams for a National Summit on Firearms and Domestic Violence. At the Summit, the teams were charged with developing strategies to ensure the implementation of the firearms prohibitions. One of the remaining challenges highlighted at the Summit is the issue of the safe storage and proper return of firearms to persons whose protection orders have expired. We will continue to examine these important issues in the future.

On a final note, I want to personally thank the Senate Judiciary Committee's staff for working with the Department on S. 327, the "Improving Assistance to Domestic and Sexual Violence Victims Act of 2009". We appreciate revisions to the Arrest Program's HIV testing requirement that will enable more jurisdictions full access to Arrest funding and help sexual assault victims receive free HIV testing and prophylaxis. We also welcome provisions that ensure that grantee jurisdictions cannot impose certain fees on victims of dating violence.

We look forward to enjoying the same level of cooperation with you and your staff when work begins on the next reauthorization of VAWA.