



## 1994 – 2009: Commemorating 15 Years of the Violence Against Women Act

Dear Friends,

Fifteen years ago, we saw the result of the hard work of dedicated advocates throughout the nation, when landmark legislation, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), was signed into law on September 13, 1994.

And today, President Barack Obama commemorated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic law in a [Presidential Proclamation](#):

*“Far too many women in our communities and neighborhoods, and across the world, continue to suffer from violence. Inspired by the promise and achievement of the Violence Against Women Act, our Nation stands united in its determination to end these crimes and help those in need.*

*NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act. I call upon men and women of all ages, communities, organizations, and all levels of government, to work in collaboration to end violence against women.”*

Without a doubt, VAWA would never have happened without the steadfast commitment and work of the countless advocates, coalitions and community partners who worked tirelessly for this landmark legislation, and without the dedication of our Vice President, then-U.S. Senator Joe Biden, and U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch.

The VAWA recognized the severity of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking and provided federal funding to help communities in their efforts to address the needs of survivors and hold offenders accountable. In marking this historic moment, I encourage you to reflect on where we were before, before the VAWA, and where we are now.

Thirty years ago, when a law enforcement officer responded to domestic abuse, it was considered a “family matter.” Spousal rape was not a crime. Many States did not have domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, or hotlines.

Thirty years ago, programs for culturally and linguistically specific groups were unheard of. Disabled women and women in later in life were not thought to be vulnerable to abuse. We had little understanding of the dynamics of teen relationships and the potential for sexual assault and intimate partner violence. We did not recognize the co-occurrence of child maltreatment, and sexual and domestic violence nor did we understand the devastating impact of early victimization and exposure to violence.

But thirty years ago, a diverse group of advocates organized to change the way our nation thought about and responded to violence against women. It became safer for survivors to talk to one another and speak about their struggles with the justice system. Survivors and advocates talked to legislators, educated policy makers, and changed the way our nation viewed and responded to violence against women. They stressed the necessity for treating domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking as crimes, for federal legislation that would support local efforts throughout the country, and vastly change the way we as a nation responded to survivors and offenders.

It took another 15 years to enact the VAWA, but since then countless lives have been saved, the voices of survivors have been heard, and families have been protected. Practitioners in the criminal justice system better understand the complex responses needed to address domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

Today we invite partners on the front lines of the movement —advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary, and survivors—to join us in commemorating, not only 15 years of the Violence Against Women Act, but also the many years of partnership that brings us to where we are today.

In recognition of the 15th anniversary of the VAWA, OVW announces the beginning of a year-long effort to raise public awareness, to build stronger coalitions among federal, state, local and tribal communities, and to redouble our efforts to end domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking for men, women and children across the country.

I call upon all of you to continue to innovate and collaborate with the same resolute spirit of the movement we witnessed fifteen and thirty years ago. Together we will keep women and girls safe, and find lasting community-based solutions to end violence against women and girls.

You may view additional information about OVW's plans to commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act on our website: [www.ovw.usdoj.gov/vawa15.htm](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/vawa15.htm). The Department of Justice and the Office on Violence Against Women mark this anniversary with a renewed sense of dedication. Please join us.

Sincerely,

Catherine Pierce  
Acting Director