

Wednesday, January 23, 2013

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján joined as an original cosponsor of legislation introduced today to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Passed 19 years ago, this landmark legislation focused the resources, time, and energy of federal, state, and local law enforcement on the task of preventing and stopping domestic abuse, while providing victims of violence with critical services and assistance.

“It was with great disappointment that the 112th Congress came to an end without action on a bipartisan reauthorization that addressed domestic violence and protected women,” Congressman Luján said. “With the 113th Congress underway, we should act quickly to see that that no woman ever has to suffer from domestic violence in silence. Millions of women have been protected by VAWA, and by reauthorizing and strengthening this important act we can ensure that it will continue to help women across the country.”

Last year, the United States Senate passed bipartisan legislation to reauthorize VAWA with key provisions strengthening the law. Republican leaders in the House, however, refused to bring the bipartisan bill to a vote on the House floor, instead pushing a weakened version that excluded protections, including those for Native American women. As a result, VAWA failed to secure reauthorization during the last Congress.

“This measure is a comprehensive bill that addresses the seriousness of violent crimes targeted toward women, including in Indian Country,” Luján added. “I represent 17 of the 22 Native American tribes in New Mexico and I know that tribal families are all too often impacted by domestic violence. Unfortunately, violent crimes committed on tribal lands go unprosecuted more often than they should because of loopholes in existing laws. This bill will close the loopholes and ensure Native American have the protection they deserve by allowing local law enforcement to prosecute crimes committed on tribal lands.”

VAWA has improved the criminal justice system’s ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. Based on this legislation, every state has enacted laws to make stalking a crime and strengthened criminal rape statutes. Since VAWA became law, the annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50 percent – and reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51 percent.

VAWA has successfully encouraged communities and law enforcement agencies to coordinate their responses to violence against women and provide effective, long-term support for victims. Failure to enact this bill again would deprive women, children, and families of vital protection against abuse and law enforcement of essential tools to combat violence.

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