

Eliminating domestic violence

By Eliot Engel

In October, we commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month and recommit ourselves to ending domestic violence and sexual abuse in America.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a crowning achievement of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues and a truly bipartisan success. Since VAWA was enacted in 1994, we have made great strides toward ending domestic violence and stopping the cycle of abuse in our communities. States have passed more than 660 laws to combat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline has answered over 1 million calls. We have come a long way since the initial passage of VAWA. But there is no doubt we have a long way to go.

Americans have a right to feel safe in their communities, their workplaces and their homes. Yet domestic violence remains a serious problem across the country. Nearly one in four women will experience domestic violence during her lifetime. And slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in households

with children under age 12. To end the cycle of violence and promote healthy families, we must ensure that communities have resources to prevent abuse and provide victims of domestic violence the support they need. We are on the way to making that a reality.

Just recently, the House of Representatives passed a partial renewal of VAWA, making improvements to the law including the establishment of new rape crisis centers and increasing grants for community organizations that work to prevent domestic violence. The bill also calls for public information campaigns to reach communities that are less likely to report domestic violence.

VAWA passed overwhelmingly in the House, but in the 11th

hour, House Republicans stripped a vital provision that recognizes the unique challenges that racial and ethnic minorities face in reporting and getting help for domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking and stalking. With this change, domestic violence prevention and treatment services specifically targeting women of color and immigrant victims of domestic violence and sexual assault will continue to be shortchanged. That provision must be restored in the Senate.

We must also ensure that impor-

tant VAWA provisions that were not contained in the House bill are also renewed. This includes emergency shelters and other housing options, crisis hotlines, community outreach programs, public health initiatives, counseling services, and prevention and education programs.

But even with VAWA's great successes and promising future, we know that our work is not yet done.

There are solutions to preventing the 960,000 incidents of violence that are reported against a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend each year. The country must not tolerate the violence, abuse, and sexual assault pervading our society. We must continue to fight for measures to provide better economic security for victims of violence, increased protections for battered immigrants, promote awareness in underserved populations, enhance protection of victims' personal information, and develop programs designed to prevent domestic violence before it occurs.

This month, we renew the fight against domestic violence and abuse in America. Together, we can eliminate domestic violence across the country and ensure that our children grow up in healthy, peaceful environments.

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Point of view is an occasional column open to all readers.



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