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414.278.5079

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414.643.4799

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414.278.4978

P.O. Box 080319
Milwaukee, WI 53208

Supervisor Lipscomb, Chair
Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Intergovernmental Relations Committee
Milwaukee County Courthouse
901 N. 9th Street, Room 201
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear Supervisor Lipscomb and Committee members:

Since originally passed in the early 1990's, the Violence against Women Act (VAWA) has provided critical protections for thousands of women, children and families in the United States. Through this legislation many cities, municipalities and counties receive necessary funding to support critical programs that provide services to the most vulnerable citizens among us.

Years of data collected reveals that 1 in 4 women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes. In 2010, **29% of all homicides** in Wisconsin were the result of domestic violence, and victims ranged in ages from 1-87 years old. After three consecutive years of increases in the number domestic violence related deaths in Milwaukee County, preliminary data suggests that our community experienced a decrease in 2011. However, despite this decrease, there was an overall increase in the number of domestic violence related crimes in Milwaukee as well as a **significant increase in the level of brutality** (e.g. stabbings, shootings, strangulation, etc.) directed toward victims. For some victims, the abuse they suffered left them with lifelong injuries.

Women are not the only victims of domestic violence. Research has consistently shown that children who grow up in violent homes are four times more likely to be abused themselves. Every 13 minutes in Wisconsin, a child is reported abused or neglected. The level of abuse may be attributed to the increase in family stress resulting from the growing rate of poverty, unemployment and homelessness in our community.

Today victims are presenting with more and more complex needs. They are at risk of being homeless. They lack food, clothing and transportation. Many do not have access to regular health care. Years of isolation at the hands of an abuser have left many victims without the self-confidence and skills needed to secure and maintain employment. Equally troubling: an increasing number of victims (and their children) are presenting with chronic, untreated mental health problems that have developed as a result of years of struggling in poverty.

The Violence Against Women Act supports core program such as shelter services, legal advocacy programs, safe exchange centers, court based programs, coordinated community response services, enhanced law enforcement and specialized prosecution in hundreds of communities in each state in the Union. Programs, similar to Sojourner Family Peace Center (SFPC), count on the vital resources that VAWA affords to help increase safety and security for battered women, children and families.

No one deserves to be abused and living a violence free life is a basic human right. VAWA affirms our collective belief in this idea. Supporting this legislation allows our nation, community leaders and citizens to support, in tangible and concrete ways, services that end domestic violence and transform lives.

The mission of Sojourner Family Peace Center is to ensure the safety of victims of family violence and provide a pathway out of violence for victims and abusers through opportunities to make positive and lasting changes for themselves and their children. We remain deeply committed to breaking the cycle of family violence in our community. To accomplish this, we work closely with a broad range of community stakeholders, including law enforcement, prosecution, child welfare providers, schools and community-based organizations.

We believe that the Violence Against Women Act is a fundamental component of ending domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault. We applaud Supervisor Romo-West, Taylor, Hass and Stamper for sponsoring this resolution and we urge this committee to pass this resolution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carmen Pitre', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Carmen Pitre
Co-Executive Director