



ForensicNurses.org

p 410 626 7805
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August 1, 2022

RE: An open letter to the U.S. Congress, the Biden Administration, state and local officials, and stakeholders

As representatives of the nationwide community to address and end sexual assault and violence, we applaud this year's enactment of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization Act. We stand as partners in the government-wide effort to ensure access to necessary services for victims of violence. The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) is the world's first forensic nursing organization. Since 1992, we have led the world in defining the depth and breadth of nursing practice where the health and legal systems intersect. Forensic nurses are on the front lines of caring for victims of violence across the lifespan throughout healthcare systems in the states, tribes, and territories, with a mission to provide trauma-informed, patient-centered care to individuals who are experiencing acute and long-term health consequences associated with victimization or violence.

Now that the VAWA reauthorization has been enacted into law, we respectfully urge federal and state agencies assigned with statutory jurisdiction over VAWA programs to implement the law promptly and effectively. We also call on federal and state agencies and officials to work together and consult with external stakeholder experts, as appropriate and according to Congressional intent.

Passage of VAWA was an essential step in maintaining the cornerstone of our nation's response to domestic and sexual violence. It is vital that these initiatives be thoughtfully built and foundationally elevated to ensure that assistance reaches victims in need and that programs receive the coordinated support and resources required to be successful and sustainable.

The drive to update and reauthorize VAWA for the first time in nearly 10 years acknowledged the gravity and true life-and-death circumstances that so many individuals, families, and communities encounter in this country every day. Congress' successful reauthorization effort reflected a sincere commitment to victims and a recognition by our federal representatives that the safety of those who are vulnerable and at risk of violence is paramount over political discord and partisan wins. We encourage a timely implementation process that fully responds to the needs of victims and provides the professional community with tools and resources necessary to conduct its critical work at the intersection of healthcare and justice.

Again, we thank the VAWA champions and supporters in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives for their dedication to victims, and the Biden Administration for its continued advocacy and prioritization of VAWA programs. Please do not hesitate to call upon us as resources throughout VAWA implementation as we all work towards the shared goal of keeping individuals safe and free from violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Pierce-Weeks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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