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Hawaii Attorney General Urges Senate to Reauthorize Violence Against Women Act

HONOLULU – Hawaii Attorney General Clare E. Connors has joined a coalition of 24 attorneys general, led by Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, urging the U.S. Senate to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, which expired more than a year ago. As isolation and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic increases the risk to domestic violence victims, the Senate must act immediately, the attorneys general argue.

In April of 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill with bipartisan support reauthorizing the act, but after more than a year, the Senate has not taken up consideration of the bill, nor has it taken up a companion bill sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

“Ensuring that our laws adequately address violence against women remains an important priority on all levels of government,” said Attorney General Connors. “Indeed, the current pandemic has demonstrated the continued need for the Act and we hope it will be reauthorized.”

The Violence Against Women Act, originally passed in 1994, created an Office on Violence Against Women within the Department of Justice, and provides billions of dollars for investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against women, as well as financial support to women in need.

The act has been reauthorized several times, most recently in 2013. Each time Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, it expanded the protections under the law with bipartisan support.

The Attorneys Generals’ letter notes that the COVID-19 pandemic makes reauthorizing the act even more urgent, as measures to contain the virus can exacerbate isolation, uncertainty, and economic instability, directly impacting victims of domestic violence.

“Violence against women has been a public health crisis for generations, and the COVID-19 outbreak illustrates the urgent need to further strengthen protections for women under federal law,” the letter states.

Domestic violence is also a threat to law enforcement, the letter notes. According to a 2017 report by the U.S. Department of Justice, 29 percent of the 133 line-of-duty deaths responding to calls for service were related to domestic disputes.

The House bill expands the protections of the Violence Against Women Act by:

- Strengthening protections for Native women by expanding jurisdiction of tribal courts over non-Native men who abuse Native women
- Codifying important protections for LGBTQ individuals
- Closing the “boyfriend loophole,” which allows certain abusive dating partners to continue possessing firearms under federal law

“Reauthorization of (the Violence Against Women Act) will not end the scourge of gender-based violence, but it is an important step toward more fully addressing the tragic epidemic,” the letter states. “The importance of urgent action is underscored by the particular challenges faced by victims and survivors during the COVID-19 outbreak. We urge you to move quickly to adopt the House-passed bill or the Senate companion sponsored by Senator Feinstein. Women in our states are counting on it.”

In addition to Ferguson, Attorney General Connors is joined by the attorneys general from California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin and Washington, D.C.

The letter can be found [here](#).

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