



## **FACT SHEET: Obama Administration Highlights Unprecedented Coordination across Federal Government to Combat Violence Against Women**

*As part of ongoing Administration efforts to reduce domestic and sexual abuse, HHS, HUD, DOJ, Treasury, Labor and FDIC announce new initiatives to protect victims of abuse, provide resources to prevent abuse*

Today, the Obama Administration is highlighting unprecedented coordination and cooperation across the entire government to protect victims of domestic and sexual violence and enable survivors to break the cycle of abuse. As part of this ongoing government-wide effort, HHS, HUD, DOJ, Treasury, Labor and FDIC today announced new initiatives to protect victims of abuse and provide resources for families and communities to prevent abuse. Violence is still a significant barrier in many women's lives, and this Administration is committed to taking concrete action to reduce domestic violence in this country. One-in-every-four women experiences domestic violence during their lifetimes and more than 20 million women in the U.S. have been victims of rape. Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence every year. The impact of abuse lingers for years, both for victims and their children.

In response, the President has called on every agency in the Federal government to be part of the solution to ending violence against women. Domestic violence and sexual assault are not just criminal justice issues – the scope and far-reaching effects of violence require a coordinated response across the Federal government.

The initiatives announced and highlighted today demonstrate a broad, comprehensive response to reducing violence against women. Specifically, these concrete actions include steps to:

- Protect Children and Break the Cycle of Violence
- Improve Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence
- Increase Sexual Assault Arrests and Successful Prosecutions
- Help Victims Regain Housing and Financial Independence

### **Protect Children and Break the Cycle of Violence**

Intervening early to reach children and young families experiencing domestic and sexual violence is a crucial element of our strategy to end violence against women. Without intervention, children who witness violence are at greater risk of developing behavioral problems, psychiatric disorders, school failure, and violence against others.

- Through the Affordable Care Act's new **Pregnancy Assistance Fund**, 5 states (NC, NM, OR, VA, and WA) will start this month providing help for pregnant women who are victims of domestic and sexual violence. High schools, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices, health clinics, and child welfare agencies will have tools to

reach vulnerable women and connect them with services. One in twelve adult women are abused during pregnancy and 25-50% of adolescent mothers experience domestic violence before, during, or just after pregnancy. Children born to abused mothers are 30% more likely to require intensive care upon birth.

- The Affordable Care Act's new **Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program** provides \$1.5 billion over five years to States for evidence-based home visitation services. The law requires every state to consider domestic violence as one of six benchmarks in improving the health and safety of families in at-risk communities. Nurses, social workers, educators, child development specialists or other well-trained staff will promote the health and well-being of children and their families in these communities, intervening early to reduce rates of domestic violence and child abuse.
- The HHS **Head Start** program is reaching out to pregnant women and parents of young children to prevent and respond to domestic violence. Head Start centers in 6 states (AL, FL, MI, MT, NM, and SC) are launching a community-based Safe Families, Safe Homes early education curriculum. This effort will help Head Start staff and community partners identify and respond to young children exposed to violence. This week, HHS is also sending guidance to thousands of Head Start and other early childhood programs across the country and urging them to address domestic violence by providing these programs with information about the Safe Families, Safe Homes curriculum and other available resources.
- The Attorney General has launched the **Defending Childhood Initiative** to protect children from the harmful consequences of witnessing violence. The initiative will work to prevent exposure to all types of violence and build children's resiliency to recover and thrive when violence does occur.
- The new HHS **Enhancing Services for Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence** program supports innovative, evidence-informed services for children exposed to domestic violence. Starting this month, projects in four states (AK, NJ, ID, and WI) and a national clearinghouse will help children heal from the trauma of abuse and build stronger community services.

### **Improve Legal Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence**

Providing victims with greater access to legal assistance and civil protection orders are essential strategies in reducing abuse. Studies show that access to legal services helps victims escape from abusive relationships, and that access to counsel has reduced domestic violence by as much as 21%. Protective orders are effective in reducing the level of violence and fear of harm for many victims, but they must be properly enforced.

- Today, the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, in partnership with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, is releasing new tools for communities to improve enforcement of protective orders. ***Civil Protection Orders: A Guide for Improving Practice*** will keep victims and their children safe by providing guidance to advocates, attorneys, judges, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors to ensure that protective orders are issued, served and enforced throughout the United States.

- Today, the Department of Justice, with assistance from the White House, is launching **Access to Justice for Domestic Violence Victims**, a pilot project to encourage more commitment from the private bar to provide pro bono legal services to victims of domestic violence. Beginning in New Orleans and Baltimore, private law firms will hire law students who have participated in law school clinics and defer their start dates while they work at domestic violence service providers. The lawyers will help victims secure protective orders, navigate the family courts, and access safe housing. *Access to Justice* will encourage ongoing pro bono partnerships between private law firms, domestic violence service providers and law school clinics.

### **Increase Sexual Assault Arrests and Successful Prosecutions**

One in six women and one in thirty-three men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes, but fewer than 1 in 6 rapes are reported to the police. Women who have been raped have high rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts.

- The Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) is launching a new **national campaign to reduce sexual violence in the United States** by improving the criminal justice system response, increasing services for victims, and changing attitudes. Today, the White House Council on Women and Girls and the Department of Justice held the first ever national roundtable on sexual violence at the White House. Over the next six months, OVW will hold regional forums around the country to engage the public in their sexual assault reduction campaign. In the 2011 budget, President Obama has proposed doubling funding for VAWA programs serving victims of sexual assault.
- **Reducing the backlog of rape kits** can be a powerful way to get rapists off the streets. Today, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is launching a new effort to identify long term solutions to the DNA backlog of sexual assault cases. In up to 5 jurisdictions, the project will team researchers with law enforcement agencies, crime labs, prosecutors, and victim advocates. The teams will identify underlying causes of the backlog, create new systems for tracking, screening and testing DNA evidence, and apply strategies to prevent backlogs from developing in the future. As a result of this project, NIJ aims to eliminate backlogs and develop innovative practices that can be adapted nationwide.

### **Help Victims Regain Housing and Financial Independence**

Perpetrators of domestic violence often create serious obstacles that prevent victims from achieving economic independence and self-sufficiency. Without financial independence and a stable place to live, victims and their children are trapped with nowhere else to go. As a result, victims of domestic violence are often forced to choose between staying in an abusive relationship or facing economic hardship, poverty, and homelessness. But when victims improve their economic stability, they increase their likelihood of living separately from their abusers.

- Today, Secretary Donovan is releasing much-anticipated rules that provide guidance to housing authorities and landlords to evict perpetrators of abuse, keep their properties safe, and **make sure victims do not lose their housing due to crimes committed against**

**them.** Prior to the passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 2005, victims of domestic violence were afraid to call the police or seek help because their landlords might find out about the assault and evict them. VAWA created new protections for victims in publicly assisted housing, but rules governing these provisions were never finalized.

- Last month, the Department of the Treasury and the White House convened domestic violence organizations, asset-building experts, credit union organizations, and other financial educators to determine ways to help victims **build credit, access safe financial products, and save for the future.** Treasury is working with the Financial Literacy and Education Commission, its MyMoney.gov website, the President's Advisory Council on Financial Capability, and its private sector and government partners to connect domestic violence organizations with existing financial education and access resources.
- The FDIC is also helping victims recover from financial abuse by updating their popular **Money Smart** financial literacy curriculum to include information for victims of domestic violence. The new Money Smart curriculum will be available Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Two weeks ago, HHS launched a new coordinated effort to ensure that more victims of domestic violence file for Federal refundable tax credits like the **Earned Income Tax Credit**, use low-cost tax preparation services, and use tax time as an opportunity to access tools like savings bonds that help them save for the future.
- Access to non-traditional job training can be an important tool for victims of domestic violence to rebuild financial stability. In the coming weeks, the Department of Labor Women's Bureau is releasing *A Woman's Guide to Green Jobs* and coordinating with Wider Opportunities for Women and the National Network to End Domestic Violence to make sure that survivors have access to new green jobs.
- Today, in partnership with the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the Office on Violence Against Women is launching a new **virtual resource for employers** to address the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace. [www.workplacesrespond.org](http://www.workplacesrespond.org) provides new tools for employers, including interactive training and customized model policies to keep victims safely employed.

### **Respond to Urgent Needs with the President's 2011 Budget Request**

- In response to the need to strengthen services to victims, the President's 2011 budget proposed an additional \$130 million to help victims find shelter, counseling, legal assistance, transitional housing and other direct services. \$100 million of the increase is from the Crime Victims' Fund, which does not consist of taxpayer dollars; it is self-sustaining and supported by criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, and penalties for federal offenders.