

ICYMI: LA Times VAWA Editorial - Reauthorize VAWA Without Limits

From: The Honorable Judy Chu

Date: 5/15/2012

Dear Colleague,

In case you missed it—please see below for today’s *Los Angeles Times* editorial on the Violence Against Women Act.

Sincerely,

/s

/s

Judy Chu

Loretta Sanchez

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

latimes.com

Editorial

Partisanship and the Violence Against Women Act

The House need to reauthorize the law, without limits, as it has in the past, so Republicans can demonstrate that helping battered women is more important than political games.

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The political climate in Congress is so noxious these days that even a law that originally passed with overwhelming bipartisan support because it provided much-needed help to abused women is now a partisan issue. That's shameful. Republicans in the House should drop their attempts to undermine the Violence Against Women Act and instead move swiftly to reauthorize and strengthen the existing program, as the Senate has already done.

First enacted in 1994, the law has been renewed twice without a fight. Last week, however, some of the same GOP lawmakers who once endorsed this sensible law retreated, voting in committee to strip out provisions designed to protect immigrants. Under VAWA as it has long existed, if an immigrant married to a U.S. citizen or a green-card holder — and therefore eligible to stay in the country permanently — can show evidence of abuse, he or she may file independently without having to rely on the abusive spouse. VAWA's gender-neutral protections apply to legal and illegal immigrants and allow the victim to file confidentially.

Confidentiality is crucial. As the Republican-led House Judiciary Committee noted in its 2005 report to reauthorize VAWA and expand protections, without such guarantees, an abuser could try to derail a spouse's green-card application or push to have him or her deported. A battered woman whose application depends on her abusive husband certainly might think twice about filing if she knew her abuser would be notified that she was seeking help without him.

Eliminating the confidentiality provision is one of several changes House Republicans would like to make to weaken the law. They argue that the changes are necessary to combat fraud, in which immigrants falsely claim to have been abused in order to obtain visas. But where are the data and studies that indicate that fraud is a problem? Immigrant victims who petition for visas under VAWA are already required to supply ample evidence of abuse, such as police reports or medical records. And applications undergo intense scrutiny. In fiscal 2011, immigration officials denied nearly a third of those petitions.

The House reauthorization bill also seeks to undercut a provision that allows undocumented immigrants who assist in prosecutions of serious crimes to apply for U visas, and ultimately obtain green cards. The proposed changes would allow victims to obtain temporary visas only. Surely, even those lawmakers who embrace anti-immigrant legislation can appreciate that U visas help protect American citizens too, by encouraging witnesses to step forward without fear of deportation. That's why the program enjoys the backing of many law enforcement groups.

The House will vote on Wednesday. It should reauthorize VAWA without limits, as it has in the past, and demonstrate that helping battered women, including those who are immigrants, isn't a partisan issue.