

# **ICYMI: Detroit Free Press Guest Commentary- Oppose HR 4970**

**From: The Committee on the Judiciary - Minority Staff**

**Bill: H.R. 4970**

**Date: 5/15/2012**

Dear Colleague,

In case you missed it—please see below for today’s Detroit Free Press guest commentary on the Violence Against Women Act.

For further information on the overwhelming opposition to H.R. 4970, please visit the Minority Judiciary Committee website: <http://democrats.judiciary.house.gov/issue/materials-opposing-republican-violence-against-women-act-hr-4970>

Sincerely,

/s

/s

John Conyers, Jr.

Zoe Lofgren

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

## **Guest commentary: Congress must not weaken the Violence Against Women Act**

May 15, 2012

For nearly 20 years, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has been effective at protecting victims of domestic and sexual violence and holding perpetrators accountable. Domestic violence has dropped by more than half since the legislation became law in 1994.

Yet the House of Representatives is set to consider a bill this week that would repeal and weaken some of VAWA's most critical protections.

VAWA has long enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support. Bills to reauthorize and further strengthen its protections passed by near-unanimous votes in 2000 and

2005. Bipartisanship was also on display last month when Senate Democrats and Republicans passed their own bill to strengthen VAWA with supermajority support.

But the bill now being pushed by House Republican leadership is different. Unlike every VAWA reauthorization before it, this bill would leave women less protected than under current law. The bill would endanger victims, embolden perpetrators of violence, and eliminate essential law enforcement tools to keep women safe. It is a giant leap backward.

House Republican leaders argue that opposition to their bill is hollow partisanship. But a diverse and wide-ranging coalition of domestic violence organizations, women's groups, faith-based groups, and law enforcement agencies beg to differ.

The leading domestic violence organizations, including the thousands of service providers in the National Network to End Domestic Violence, strongly oppose the bill because it would "weaken, rather than enhance, protections for victims of domestic violence." Leading researchers in universities across the country echo their concerns over how the bill will "roll back and eviscerate protections."

These are the real people on the front lines against domestic and sexual violence in the country. They are not partisan organizations seeking to score political points.

Neither are the faith-based groups, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Association of Evangelicals, that also harbor deep concerns over the sections of the bill repealing protections for battered immigrant women. Many of these protections have been in the law for almost 20 years. A recent letter to Congress states that they are "deeply troubled" by the bill's efforts to "roll back protections in current law for battered non-citizens, making them more vulnerable and, in some cases, endangering their lives."

The National Organization for Women (NOW) denounced last Tuesday's passage of the bill in committee. The Evangelical Church and NOW usually don't agree. But both groups share similar concerns and oppose the House bill.

A coalition of law enforcement officers with expertise in domestic and sexual violence cases has also expressed in a letter to Congress their "strong opposition" to provisions in the House bill. Among other things, the bill fails to include provisions requested by law enforcement organizations -- including the Fraternal Order of Police and its 330,000 officers -- critical to investigating crimes and prosecuting offenders.

In contrast, the few supporters of the House Republican bill we know of include anti-immigrant organizations, groups that purport to represent the interests of men accused of domestic violence and one international marriage brokerage company reported to have a financial incentive in eliminating protections for "mail order brides." A Federal jury in 2006 found that the head of this company, who lobbies for the changes contained in the House bill, intentionally withheld information about VAWA protections to a pregnant and severely battered immigrant woman to protect her company's "95% success rate."

House Republicans can continue to dismiss opposition to their bill as knee-jerk partisanship. But the broad coalition opposed to the bill tells quite a different story.

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