

OP-ED: H.R. 4970 Undermines VAWA Protections

From: The Honorable Theodore E. Deutch

Bill: H.R. 4970

Date: 5/15/2012

"H.R. 4970 would erode the protections necessary to make the Violence Against Women Act effective in protecting victims of violence."

Dear Colleague:

I wanted to bring to your attention an op-ed that appeared in the *Orlando Sentinel* this weekend on HR 4970, the "Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization" (VAWA). The op-ed was written by Sister Ann Kendrick, the founder of the Office of Farmworker Ministry in Apopka, Florida and the latest in a long line of women's and victims' rights advocates to come out in opposition to H.R. 4970.

As the op-ed points out, this streamlined version of VAWA, which has already been marked-up in the House Judiciary Committee and is scheduled to be on the floor of the full House later this week, will do much harm by removing important safeguards and protections for victims of domestic violence. Unfortunately, the markup in the House Judiciary Committee did not result in significant changes to the bill that would provide meaningful protections to victims of domestic violence. Instead of considering HR 4970, the House of Representatives should be moving to protect victims of domestic violence by taking up bills that would reauthorize VAWA completely like my colleague Congresswoman Gwen Moore's bill H.R. 4271 or S. 1925 which has already passed the Senate with strong bipartisan support by a vote of 68 to 31.

Sincerely,

Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress

Orlando Sentinel (Opinion):

Congress must restore law to protect women from violence

May 6, 2012 | By Ann Kendrick | Guest columnist

Mother's Day is approaching, and as we all look forward to celebrating the most important women in our lives, we cannot ignore sobering realities about violence against women in America.

The topic is timely. Congress is expected to begin debating the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act this week.

This law has helped reduce domestic violence by more than half. Yet, the numbers are still staggering. One out of every four women in America experiences domestic violence or sexual assault in her lifetime. Every day, several thousand domestic-violence incidents occur in our country. Yet only a small percentage are reported.

Immigrant women are at even higher risk, because immigration status becomes one more weapon the abuser uses to manipulate the victim.

These statistics are abstract. The stories of individuals I see every day are far easier to understand.

I have worked with many women in the Orlando area for whom the Violence Against Women Act was the key to freeing themselves from violent, abusive relationships in which they were trapped.

That is why the upcoming reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in Congress is so important. We, as a nation, need to protect the most vulnerable from violence and abuse. It's common sense.

Central Florida's own congresswoman, [Sandy Adams](#), is the lead sponsor of one proposed reauthorization bill, H.R. 4970. Adams admirably extricated herself and her daughter from an abusive relationship, went on to work three jobs to put herself through school, and became a deputy sheriff.

She should be the perfect person to understand the significance of this legislation and to sponsor the reauthorization bill.

But that background is what makes her proposal all the more disturbing and disheartening.

Adams' bill, which the [House Judiciary Committee](#) will vote on next week, is not the Violence Against Women Act that has stood for almost two decades, reauthorized with bipartisan support. Instead, H.R. 4970 has been hijacked by other congressmen with political agendas and has become a step backward, not forward, in protecting vulnerable women and children.

If enacted, H.R. 4970 would increase the danger for women at risk from domestic violence and sexual assault. The Adams bill would further deter and discourage victims of these heinous crimes from going to the police for help, and it would actually increase abusers' power.

For example, when the Violence Against Women Act was created 18 years ago, "self-petitioning" was built in so that immigrant victims of abuse and violence could seek immigration status and relief on their own, taking this weapon of control away from the abuser. This provision is a key for the victim to free herself from being shackled to the abuser for immigration reasons.

The Adams bill would put the weapon of control back in the hands of the abuser. And this is only one of the ways H.R. 4970 would erode the protections necessary to make the Violence Against Women Act effective in protecting victims of violence.

It is not too late. Adams and others can still fix the reauthorization bill and restore all the necessary protections that conscience and common sense demand.

The women and children who are trapped in abusive and violent situations — in the Orlando area and in every community across the country — are crying out in silence for Americans of good conscience to do the right thing.
