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ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL URGES SENATE TO REAUTHORIZE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT
COVID-19 Pandemic Increases Challenges for Victims, Survivors

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today joined a coalition of 24 attorneys general urging the U.S. Senate to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, which expired more than a year ago. In April 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 yet to take up consideration of the bill, nor has it taken up a companion bill sponsored by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.

“The Violence Against Women Act allows states to access resources that help local law enforcement and state’s attorneys investigate and prosecute domestic violence, as well as supporting efforts by nonprofit organizations to support survivors,” Raoul said. “I urge the Senate to renew this vital law, that is even more important as many victims and survivors face uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

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 the 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 also threatens 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 American women by expanding the 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.”

Joining Raoul in sending the letter are the attorneys general from California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.