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UUA Celebrates Senate Passage of the Violence Against Women Act

April 26, 2012, Washington, DC - The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations commends the U.S. Senate for passing the Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”, S. 1925). Originally passed by the U.S. Congress in 1994, VAWA has provided the most significant policy response to crimes of domestic and sexual violence, giving law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges the tools they need to hold offenders accountable and keep communities safe while supporting survivors. Reauthorized twice before today, VAWA has had a tremendous impact and has saved billions of dollars. In its new version, it expands its effectiveness while reducing costs to the federal government by 20 percent.

A product of collaborations between law enforcement officials, advocates, service professionals, and others, the reauthorized VAWA of 2012 has many new and improved provisions for the protection and care of all women, especially marginalized populations. Among them, Native American officials were granted new legal capabilities to prosecute non-Native perpetrators of crimes against Native people. The legislation also expands protections for gay, lesbian, and transgender couples and provides a more streamlined immigration process for undocumented immigrants who have been victims of abuse. Though Republicans attempted to weaken these protections and institute mandatory minimum sentences for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence, advocates and legislators in support of VAWA were successful in allowing no significant amendments to be made to the original bill.

The U.S. House of Representatives must pass its version of the Violence Against Women Act for the reauthorization to be complete. The bill that has been proposed lacks many of the vital improvements contained in the Senate version, particularly those provisions for expanded protections of marginalized groups, and is the subject of opposition of many groups which advocated for the legislation which passed in the Senate. The House is expecting to debate the bill as early as mid-May.

Anchored in a strong historical commitment to reproductive justice, the UUA is working with many partners, including the Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Catholics for Choice, the National Women’s Law Center, and Planned Parenthood Federation of America, to defeat measures like the Blunt amendment. These interfaith and secular pro-choice advocates are working hard to mobilize the grassroots against these extreme measures which criminalize health care and erode women’s dignity and self-determination. Unitarian Universalists are encouraged to continue contacting their elected officials and community leaders in support of reproductive justice for all.