



National Alliance to
End Sexual Violence

national **latin@** network
casa de esperanza



April 24, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressional Leadership,

As Congress recognizes April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we have seen a groundswell of victims across industries in recent months speaking out, for themselves, and for those who cannot, as part of the #MeToo movement. Sexual harassment and sexual violence is all too pervasive, particularly for those who work for low wages are especially vulnerable to experiencing workplace sexual violence.

According to a 2015 study, one in three women reported being sexually harassed at work. The numbers get worse in low-paid, customer-service driven industries. For example, a 2014 survey found more than 50% of women in food service report experiencing sexual harassment from customers, vendors, managers, or coworkers on a weekly basis. Women who work in the agricultural, janitorial, home health care, and domestic worker industries, among others, have also been shown to experience high levels of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

To effect widespread change to prevent and end this type of harassment and violence, we are supporting the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). We also strongly support increased federal funding for prevention, intervention, and response programs for low-paid workers vulnerable to experiencing workplace sexual harassment and violence.

In VAWA, there are a few key priorities we want to highlight such as restoring full funding for the VAWA authorized program, [Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center](#). Started in 2009, this National Resource Center helps employers, employees, and workplace stakeholders by providing tools, resources, and training to prevent and respond to harassment and violence impacting the workplace. The National Resource Center recently released new how-to guides, prevention and response protocols, and specialized model trainings to help improve responses to and prevent workplace sexual harassment and violence. The appropriation of full funding for this program would support state and local partnerships to improve workplace responses and would promote the prevention of sexual violence and sexual harassment across the nation and across industries.

Any reauthorization of VAWA needs to include a strong economic justice focus since survivor safety is closely tied with economic protections and support. Survivors need to be able to address their safety and health needs without risking their job. We propose that VAWA's reauthorization bill incorporate proposals from S. 2043/H.R. 4198, the Security and Financial Empowerment (SAFE) Act. Among other provisions, the SAFE Act would protect against being terminated simply for being a victim, seeking legal assistance, or get helping with safety planning. It would also ensure that survivors of this kind of violence who have been separated from their employment, because of such violence, are eligible for unemployment insurance.

With a strong intersection between immigration, low-paid workers, and sexual violence, the protections for immigrant victims currently provided under VAWA, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and U.S. asylum laws, are critical to help provide a pathway to safety and justice for some of these particularly vulnerable survivors. It is imperative that Congress reinforce the intent of protecting all victims and safeguarding these protections for immigrant survivors, as well as support ways to strengthen those protections to better meet the needs of survivors.

In addition to protecting and expanding access to services and workplace supports, we need to change the culture that facilitates sexual harassment and violence by investing in prevention efforts in our communities and schools. The Rape Prevention Education (RPE) formula grants is a VAWA program that provides essential funding to states and territories to reach young people and front-line professionals. To meet the increased demand for this sexual violence prevention and education program, RPE must be fully funded and include additional funds to implement additional research on these evidence-informed strategies.

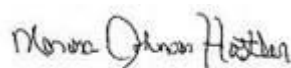
Beyond these federal programs, there are general principles and approaches that need your support. The voices of survivors of sexual violence need to be front and center. There are peer-to-peer training models, such as the *promotora* peer-leadership model, providing survivor-centered education and response best practices. We need to support the adoption of trauma-informed approaches in investigations, trainings, policies, and protocols throughout myriad systems. Finally, survivors of workplace sexual violence need access to confidential advocates to navigate the various criminal, civil legal, and workplace systems.

There are many national, state, and local organizations, as well as individual advocates and community members, ready to go beyond the hashtag and end sexual violence and ensure that these efforts include a focus on America's most vulnerable workers. We urge you to join us in reaching this goal.

Sincerely,



Esta Soler
President
Futures Without Violence



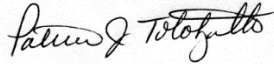
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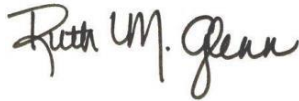
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