

Charge to the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women, April 2006

The National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women (“the Committee”) is a joint effort between the United States Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services, which was chartered by Attorney General Gonzales on January 31, 2006 to provide policy advice to the Attorney General and Secretary of Health and Human Services concerning the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act, raising public awareness regarding violence against women, and facilitating cooperation among members of the criminal justice system and our communities. The meetings of the Committee provide an organized forum to encourage public discussion of these issues.

On January 5, 2006, President Bush signed into law the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (VAWA 2005). This statute renews the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA), landmark legislation that has helped forge partnerships across all levels of government and between the criminal justice system and victim advocates to respond to crimes of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. With VAWA funding, communities across our Nation have changed the way we approach and respond to violence against women. With the reauthorization of VAWA, we have the opportunity to build on earlier efforts to reduce violence against women. New VAWA funding will empower our communities to expand their prevention efforts, ensure the safety of more victims, and hold more perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

VAWA 2005 contains important innovations that will enable communities to reach more victims and respond more effectively to violence against women. As the federal government implements these new provisions, efforts to respond to violence against women will expand into new arenas. To help shape our work in the future, the Committee is charged to address each of the following priority areas throughout its two-year term:

- 1. Children Exposed to Violence:** Research and experience have shown the dangerous effects that domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking may have on children exposed to such violence. In addition, the production of child pornography, the documentation and distribution of actual sexual assaults on children, often heightens the victimization of these victims for years to come. How can we mitigate the effects of this exposure and reduce both the risk of future victimization and perpetuation of violence? The Committee will consider strategies to address the needs of children exposed to these crimes, including services for these children and partnerships with other programs that serve children and youth. Emphasis will be placed on Native American Communities and crimes documented and distributed via the internet or other mass media.
- 2. Dating Violence:** Federal statistics tell us that young women suffer a disproportionate amount of sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Moreover, young victims face different obstacles when seeking help than do adult victims. How can we best expand our work to address dating violence against teens? In particular, the Committee will consider how to build partnerships among parents, victim advocates and middle and high schools that will enable schools, communities, and families to work together in the effort to combat dating violence. The Committee will address what school policies could enhance victim safety and improve school responses, what support services are needed for teen victims and their families, and how to provide appropriate educational programming and mentoring for students to prevent teen dating violence. The Committee will also explore how adolescent development and jargon effect the way dating violence is addressed and understood among teens, in communities, including faith communities, and in schools and how the adolescent perspective on dating violence can be used to better communicate the problem. Consideration will be given to the unique challenges faced by rural communities.
- 3. Expanding the Reach of Victim Services:** Despite the expansion of community efforts and funding, outreach and services fail to reach some segments of our society. Certain populations continue to face cultural, linguistic, and other barriers to services. These populations include, but are not limited to, immigrants, those who are not proficient in English, Native Americans, and members of the military and their families. What strategies should we employ to reach and serve these victims? In evaluating various strategies, the Committee will consider existing, successful community- and faith-based efforts to provide distinctive cultural and linguistic responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.
- 4. Outreach to Faith-Based and Community Organizations:** Religious and community organizations are often the first place a victim turns to for counseling and assistance regarding domestic and sexual violence. Smaller faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) are sometimes the only resource for victims in rural communities. How can we best coordinate efforts with these groups, and supply technical support, training, and financial assistance to these organizations? The Committee will identify how educational efforts and grant making processes can reach more FBCOs as applicants and grantees. The Committee will explore how to leverage better outcomes to reduce violence against women through increased public-private partnerships.