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October 18, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
The Majority Leader
The U.S. Senate
S-221, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Republican Leader
The U.S. Senate
S-230, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Democratic Leader
The U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John A. Boehner
The Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, the Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear House and Senate Leaders,

I write to respectfully request that you lend your full support towards passing bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) when Congress reconvenes next month.

Both of these bills are near and dear to my heart. They are critical not only for my constituents in Metro Atlanta, but also for the victims and survivors of abuse across the nation and around the world. When Congress first created these bipartisan, legislative models regarding women, human rights, and violence, we helped propel our nation's commitment to enforceable, funded statutes as a global standard.

When Congress last reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, there was overwhelmingly bipartisan support; the bill passed the Senate unanimously and the House by a vote of 414-4. Similarly, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act was unanimously adopted when the law was updated in 2005 and 2008. In both actions, a bipartisan Congress gave law enforcement, communities, and health professionals the mandate, road map, and vital tools they needed.

Unfortunately, much work remains. As you know all too well, human trafficking is one of the most prolific areas of international criminal activity, and more individuals are enslaved today than during the entire period of the transatlantic slave trade. A few years ago, my hometown of Atlanta was identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a city with one of the highest rates of child prostitution. This is a primary reason that I coauthored H.R. 2522, the Congressional Commission on the Abolition of Modern-Day Slavery Act, a bill that was incorporated into Public Law No: 110-457, the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008.

Similarly, youth domestic violence became a reality for me after a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation intern, April Love, was murdered by her boyfriend when she returned to college shortly after her internship was completed. We were all shocked and heart-broken. Like Yeardley Love, the University of Virginia student, who was similarly murdered by her boyfriend, her surname was her personality. April was bright, outgoing, friendly, and was taken from this world long before her time.

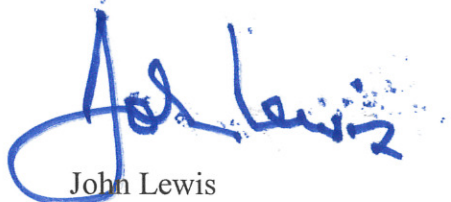
A few years later, Paul Howard, the Fulton County District Attorney, called me about the alarming increase in teen dating violence in Metro Atlanta. Clearly, April's and Yeardley's murders were not happenstance occurrences. They exemplify an expansion of domestic abuse which has been exacerbated in recent years by the growth of technology, cyber-bullying, and spaces beyond the reach of parents and teachers. Communities are in desperate need of new tools for prevention, treatment, and counseling to build the cornerstones of healthy youth relationships. This is the reason that I introduced the SMART Teen Dating Violence Prevention Act with Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI); this bill is included in every version of the VAWA reauthorization pending in the House and Senate.

Families, schools, businesses, law enforcement, health professionals, human and civil rights service providers, and so many more leaders and activists in our communities are struggling to combat these alarming national and international trends of violence. I believe in my soul that we -- as leaders, legislators, children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, women, and men -- must do everything in our power to give them the tools to stop the abuse and break these cycles by crafting and passing the strongest possible legislation as soon as possible.

In my congressional district, these are issues that bring together the most conservative and progressive minds because of the clarity of the cause -- a fight for the dignity and well-being of every human being. It is not a question of sacrificing our values, but recognizing our shared goals, and working towards them together.

As always, I thank you for your leadership and consideration of my views.

Sincerely,



John Lewis
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Howard L. Berman
The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
The Honorable Lamar Smith
The Honorable Patrick Leahy
The Honorable Chuck Grassley
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Richard G. Lugar