



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

May 7, 2012

The Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman
The Honorable John Conyers, Ranking Member
House Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers:

On behalf of the Human Rights Campaign – the nation’s leading lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization – and its more than one million members and supporters nationwide, we urge you to oppose the Adams-Cantor Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization bill (H.R. 4970). This VAWA reauthorization bill is fundamentally flawed and ignores key priorities identified by service providers and victim advocates.

Over two years ago, more than 2,000 advocates responded to surveys and national conference calls to name the most pressing issues facing victims of domestic violence. Local programs, state and federal grant administrators, national resource centers, and others weighed in on the needs of victims.

As a result of this deep dive into the existing gaps in the current VAWA, it became clear that LGBT victims of domestic violence were not receiving the services they needed – even though they experience domestic violence at roughly the same rate as all other victims. LGBT victims faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity when they sought refuge from abuse. They were turned away from service providers, laughed at by law enforcement, and struggled to get protective orders from judges. Often they were left without any option but to return to their abuser.

Two weeks ago, in a strong bi-partisan vote of 68-31, the Senate stood above politics and passed a VAWA bill (S. 1925) that takes into account the lessons learned from VAWA stakeholders. The Senate bill includes three important provisions that ensure services for LGBT victims of domestic violence are explicitly included in key VAWA grant programs and prohibit any program or activity funded by the bill from discriminating against a victim based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The Adams-Cantor VAWA eliminates these provisions, as well as many other critical provisions in the Senate bill.

We urge you oppose the Adams-Cantor VAWA reauthorization bill. For more information, please contact Allison Herwitt, Legislative Director, at (202) 216-1515 or allison.herwitt@hrc.org, David Stacy, Deputy Legislative Director, at (202) 572-8959 or david.stacy@hrc.org, or Ty Cobb, Senior Legislative Counsel at (202) 216-1537 or ty.cobb@hrc.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joe Solmonese
Executive Director