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Domestic violence bill coming up, not without opposition

by **SAMSON ADAMS**

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On any normal day in America, three women will die at the hands of someone they have been intimately involved with, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

It is statistics like this that drive Dawn Dalton and her staff at the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network to support the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

"It's a solid foundation upon which services are being provided across the country," Dalton said.

The federal law, which comes up roughly every five years for reauthorization, has always received overwhelming bipartisan support. However, this year all Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee voted against the bill when it came up for consideration in February. It passed out of committee on a 10-8 partyline vote.

The law was designed to offer federal funding for the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence related crimes and cases, while bring public awareness to the issue.

The reauthorization bill, which is an extension of the groundbreaking act first introduced by then-Sen. Joe Biden in 1994, seeks further support for those not effectively covered in its current incarnation.

Two of the more well-known changes Dalton said include "more support for people who identify as LGBT," as well as immigrants who are not yet permanent residents.

"It allows for victims of domestic violence who are immigrants, if they are being abused by the spouse, they can self-petition for residency in the United States, if they testify in the prosecution of the offender," Dalton said.

The bill, titled S. 1925, makes the language more inclusive for those members of the population, as well as expanding the special visas allocated for domestically abused immigrants.

Senator Charles Grassley, the ranking Republican on the committee, offered a substitute bill that would both cut the new additions as well as reduce the federal funding.

Though the extension has special provisions for those minorities, Sean Black, communications coordinator of the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said the act is far broader in its reach.

"Violence against women really is something that impacts every community. It's not something that's just a certain group of people, a certain age," he said. "Across the spectrum, violence against women is everywhere."

Despite the Republican opposition that surfaced in committee, Brian Naimey, spokesman for the National Network to End Domestic Violence in Washington, D.C., said he expects the bill to pass.

"In its long history, for 17 years it's had broad bipartisan support," Naimey said. "We fully expected it to be authorized."

Besides the party line voting in the Senate Judiciary Committee, the bill hasn't received a large amount of criticism, partially because "it was really needed and it is really needed," Black said.

"Do I wish they spend less on the Department of Defense and more on the Violence Against Women Act?" Black

asked.

“We understand the economic situation in this county,” he said, but “The funding from VAWA is even more needed now than ever.”



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