



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

**Opening Statement of Chair Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)**

Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services Hearing

*Ending the Cycle: Examining Ways to Prevent Domestic Violence and Promote Healthy Communities*

Zoom

Monday, March 22, 2021 | 12:00 p.m. ET

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Today, we are discussing the urgent need to update and strengthen federal programs that help prevent intimate partner violence and provide services to survivors.

Before I begin, I want to recognize that this discussion may be extremely difficult for some people who are watching. I would ask all participants to be mindful of the sensitive nature of this conversation, and I encourage anyone who needs support to visit [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org).

This is an important and timely conversation. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk for intimate partner violence and disrupted services that offer protection and support to survivors. As a result, an already quiet crisis has become even harder to both track and address.

In Oregon, leaders like Vanessa Timmons, who the committee will hear from today, are working tirelessly to reach survivors and provide them with resources and support. In the district I represent, providers like the Domestic Violence Resource Center and the Greater Portland YWCA provide shelter, support, services for children, and counseling for survivors in crisis. But we know they need more resources to meet the demand for assistance.

The urgent need to address intimate partner violence cannot be overstated. About one in four women and nearly one in ten men have reported experiencing some form of intimate partner violence. These incidents often cause physical injuries that portend even graver risks. Some reports have shown that more than half of female homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner.

For survivors of violence, the emotional trauma can last long after the physical injuries have healed. These experiences often first occur when survivors are younger than 25, triggering potentially lifelong struggles with chronic disease and mental health conditions.

Congress took a major step to address this issue in 1984 by authorizing the *Family Violence Prevention and Services Act*. Today, this central pillar in our fight against intimate partner violence is responsible for shelters, support services for survivors, and 24-hour domestic violence hotlines.

With the passage of the *Affordable Care Act* in 2010, Congress also established the Pregnancy Assistance Fund, which provided critical services to improve the health of women and children. Specifically, this program invested in expanding access to services for teen parents as well as pregnant people and new parents who are survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault.

These foundational programs are proven to be effective in addressing intimate partner violence. But they are also severely underfunded, particularly in light of today's challenges.

Just a few weeks ago in the *American Rescue Plan Act*, the Committee secured \$450 million for programs to address intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Importantly, this funding will help culturally-specific organizations outreach to underserved communities of color, which have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The historic investments in the American Rescue Plan will save lives, but we need long-term policies and investment.

Now, Congress must look to next steps, such as updating the *Family Violence Prevention and Services Act*, which we have not reauthorized since 2003, and the Pregnancy Assistance Fund, which expired in 2019.

Today, we will discuss steps to further strengthen our response to the domestic violence crisis and importantly, discuss ways that domestic violence and sexual violence can be prevented.

First, we must focus on equity. Domestic violence can affect people from any background or income, but we know that communities of color, LGBTQ individuals, and people with disabilities face disproportionate rates of intimate partner violence, yet have limited access to services. We must further expand programs that are specifically designed to reach and support these underserved communities.

We must also specifically invest in meeting the needs of Native survivors of domestic violence. We know tribal communities face unique barriers to navigating the health care and criminal justice systems with only limited access to largely underfunded support services.

Finally, and importantly, we must focus on **preventing** intimate partner violence before it happens. Currently, the only prevention program in the *Family Violence Prevention and Services Act* is significantly underfunded. Reauthorizing this law would help protect our communities from the pain and cost – emotionally, physically, and financially - of domestic violence.

We can aggressively combat intimate partner violence and prevent it from happening in the first place. It is not only the smart thing to do as rates of violence increase – it is the right thing to do for the well-being of our families and communities.

I want to thank my colleague, Representative Lucy McBath, for her leadership in working to reauthorize the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act. I also want to thank our witnesses, again, for being with us, and now I yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Fulcher.