

## WFP DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN

October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, an issue that touches all of our brothers and sisters in the workplace. According to workplace statistics used by Senator Leahy at his July 13, 2011 hearing, one in four women and one in seven men are victims of domestic violence. This is a worker health and safety issue that Women's and Fair Practices believes impacts the well-being of not just our membership, but the workplace as a whole. As such, AFGE, through the Women's and Fair Practices Departments, will be at the vanguard on this issue.

In 1994, the passage of the original Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), championed by then Senator Biden and signed into law by President Bill Clinton was a watershed in the way this country looked at domestic violence. For far too long, victims of domestic violence had hung their heads in shame, refused to report incidents of violence by intimate partners; but with the passage of VAWA, those victims were given a beacon of hope, that they would be protected if they came forward.

In 2000, the Congress and Clinton Administration reauthorized the bill, and increased the protections to include victims of dating violence. The 2000 Reauthorization also increased protections to two of the most vulnerable groups of victims: the elderly and immigrant women. In addition, the 2000 Reauthorization also increased access to transitional housing for victims of domestic violence, a must for any victim wanting to stay safe.

In 2005 the Congress and the Bush Administration reauthorized VAWA, and increased the housing protections of victims of domestic violence, ensuring that the victims and their children would have a warm, safe place to stay as they attempt to rebuild shattered lives. The 2005 Reauthorization also increased the emphasis on law enforcement and community cooperation; building coalitions to combat the scourge of domestic violence in a collaborative way rather than combating it on isolated fronts.

Many provisions of the Violence Against Women's Act were set to expire on September 30, 2011, with little fanfare or press. Congress did act to extend the provision set to expire by including it within continuing resolutions. Continuing resolutions, quite frankly, are not adequate when it comes to worker health and safety. There is a time for action, and it is now.

The Women's and Fair Practices Departments have taken an aggressive stance on interposing ourselves into the discussion about Domestic Violence. It is necessary for Women's and Fair Practices to:

- (1) **Educate the membership** -- Program Specialist Caneisha Washington developed a one-page informational awareness sheet for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. WFP Attorney Franklyn Fragomene, working with Graphics Specialist Rodrigo Alvarez, created a new pamphlet on staying safe in the workplace. This pamphlet was created specifically with accessibility in mind, using a design that provides the most important information in a clear and concise manner, while maintaining topical relevance. Members and others will be able to easily identify the steps to staying safe in the workplace and AFGE's role in that process. Thanks go out to Graphics Specialist Rodrigo Alvarez for his assistance in this endeavor. Please see the one-sheet and brochure provided for your reference.

- (2) **Change the conversation --** In the current political climate, the cash bottom line is too often the motivator; with the issue of Domestic Violence, safety should be the utmost concern. Women's and Fair Practices Attorney Franklyn Fragomene drafted legislation, and consulted the Legislative Department on the next step. Legislative Staff, Charity Wilson contacted several other major players in the VAWA Reauthorization process, and we have consulted directly with the ACLU regarding their involvement in this process.

Attorney Franklyn Fragomene and Charity Wilson will be meeting with Sen. Leahy's Staff/Sen. Leahy to further the inclusion of our language into any VAWA Reauthorization legislation. The letter sent to Sen. Leahy's office and our draft legislative language is included in the appendix for reference.

- (3) **Extend awareness --** Women's and Fair Practices is committed to making domestic violence awareness something far more than only one month out of the year. We are in the process of developing more domestic violence informational packages and awareness letters. WFP is committed to actively promoting the civil, workplace, and human rights of our sisters and brothers. We will provide technical, subject matter, programmatic support for our Districts and Locals to empower them to take on this vital cause.

We have also provided, through Attorney Franklyn Fragomene, technical assistance to District 11's Support our Sister's Community Awareness Project. We have provided legal information regarding the Violence Against Women's Act, domestic violence facts, and historical legislative background, regarding the movement towards the Violence Against Women's Act, and other planning support.

- (4) **Political Process --** The Women's and Fair Practices Departments, along with the Legislative Department, will work to support not only our legislation but all other legislation that protects workers who cope with domestic violence. We will work to build coalitions, and work within existing coalitions, to ensure that all domestic violence survivors, male or female, who find themselves in this situation have a voice.