

Remarks by Laura Wilkinson during the  
Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee's  
discussion on women's economic and health security  
July 9, 2014

Thank you Senators for convening this meeting, and for your interest in the issues facing women, and indeed everyone. I represent Legal Momentum, the nation's oldest legal defense and education fund dedicated to advancing the rights of all women and girls.

As we talk about women's economic security, I want to remind everyone that as Vice President Biden said several weeks ago -- domestic violence is central to any discussion of women's economic issues. Regarding the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Vice President Biden said: "You cannot talk about opportunity for women, unless you talk about dealing with -- in the work environment -- the violence against them ... the domestic violence."<sup>1</sup>

Although VAWA was reauthorized (for which we are exceedingly grateful), the one title (out of 9) that was not expanded at that time was the title that addressed the economic needs of survivors. Though, as Senator Harkin may recall, the Healthy Families Act also was considered for inclusion.

The importance of violence against women as a topic explains why members of Congress have said that the issue of violence comes up consistently at "Women Succeed Events." It also explains why we understand that in battleground states, violence against women ranks second in terms of people's concerns - right after jobs.

These issues are linked for many people. The paid leave bills, many of which have been worked on by state domestic violence coalitions, specifically address the needs of survivors. Survivors also need to hear that, to quote Senator Leahy, "a victim is a victim," and that victims should not lose their jobs just because they're victims:

As happened last year to a parochial school teacher in southern California who fought for stronger anti-discrimination state laws and won; and

As is working its way through the courts in New York City right now because a survivor employee of Chipotle was fired for "having too many issues," in contravention of both local and state laws.

In closing, thank you Senators for your interest in women's issues and the invitation to share our views and express support for all the issues that have been raised, particularly as relates to the needs of women and families, including single women, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

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<sup>1</sup> During the White House Working Families Summit, 6/23/14, video available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2014/06/23/vice-president-speaks-working-families-summit> (at 25:40).