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**Heller in The Hill: Congress Must Support Victims of Domestic Abuse**

**WASHINGTON** – [In a column published today in The Hill](http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/392162-action-by-congress-is-needed-to-help-victims-of-domestic), U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) urged his colleagues and members of Congress to take action on bipartisan legislation he introduced to help victims of domestic abuse.

Heller, a long-time champion of standing up for victims of violent crimes and protecting vulnerable women and children, [authored a bill that would reauthorize the historic Family Violence Prevention and Services Act](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=10B46EC8-A85C-4DD3-BBE7-8FA9DD011EC9)(FVPSA), a historic law enacted in 1984 that directs funding to states and tribes to help provide supportive services such as shelter, counseling, legal assistance and more to victims of domestic abuse and their dependents. Additionally the bill funds prevention programs and 24-hour victim assistance through the National Domestic Violence Hotline, a toll-free helpline in which highly-trained advocates offer victims of relationship abuse assistance over the phone and through their website at <http://www.thehotline.org/>.



[**Action by Congress is needed to help victims of domestic violence**](http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/392162-action-by-congress-is-needed-to-help-victims-of-domestic)

*Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV)*

More than three decades ago, the federal government took a significant step toward helping survivors of domestic, family, and dating abuse when Congress passed – and President Ronald Reagan signed into law – the historic Family Violence Prevention Services Act. Now, Congress must act again to ensure that survivors continue to have access to the critical programs supported by the first federal law to address domestic violence.

Enacted in 1984, the Family Violence Prevention Services Act provides federal grants to help states and tribes operate more than 1,600 domestic violence shelters and provide counseling, legal assistance, and other supportive services to victims of abuse and their children. It also supports the National Domestic Violence Hotline, a toll-free 24-hour helpline in which highly trained advocates offer victims of abuse assistance over the phone and through their website at <http://www.thehotline.org/>.

According to the 2016 National Census of Domestic Violence Services, in one day alone –73,000 victims throughout the country were served by programs that the Family Violence Prevention Services Act supports. To put that into perspective, the number of people helped by these programs on a single day could fill a professional football stadium.

While the nature of domestic violence has changed since 1984, the need for legislation to respond to it remains constant. That is because domestic violence transcends demographics such as gender, race and religion as well as socioeconomic status. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about four in 10 women said they experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking in their lifetimes. Furthermore, my home state of Nevada has some of the highest rates of domestic violence-related homicides in the U.S.

That is why I introduced bipartisan legislation with Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) to reauthorize the landmark Family Violence Prevention Services Act so that victims and their children can continue to access programs to help them escape abuse and find safe haven.

In addition to robbing victims of a safe place to call home, domestic violence has a lasting impact on survivors, especially children. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has reported that exposure to occurrences of domestic abuse can cause immediate and long-term effects that range from anxiety to depression.

Consider this: as reported by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, during a single day in Nevada last year, 462 victims of domestic violence accessed services that included emergency shelters, transitional housing, and non-residential assistance programs such as counseling and legal advocacy.

Further, during a 24-hour survey period, local and state hotline staff, who provide support, information and resources, answered more than 20,000 domestic violence hotline calls in a single day. At the same time, the national hotline staff answered on average 14 calls every minute. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is often the first place that victims turn for help.

The bipartisan Family Violence Prevention Services Act ensures that these programs and services alike can remain operational, and this week, more than 100 domestic violence advocates will converge on Capitol Hill to urge its passage. I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to listen to them, and to serve as a beacon of hope to victims of domestic violence by supporting this legislation and sending it to the president’s desk.

*U.S. Senator Dean Heller represents Nevada in the United States Senate and is the author of bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the landmark Family Violence Prevention Services Act, which helps states and tribes provide supportive services to victims of abuse and their children.*

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