

# Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was created as part of the 1994 Crime Bill and was reauthorized in 2000, 2005, 2013, and 2019. This flagship federal legislation has established criminalization as the primary response to intimate partner violence in the United States. It created the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) in the Department of Justice, which has awarded over \$9 billion in federal grants.

The principle goals of the VAWA have been:

- To relegate violence prevention and response to police and incarceration
- To learn more about violence through a criminalization lens
- To shift public attitudes through collusion between the legal system, social service agencies, research organizations, schools, public health organizations, and private organizations
- To disburse federal grant dollars

## VAWA had two major arms:

1. Changing written law, including creating new federal crimes related to intimate partner violence
2. Creating new allocations of funding to police departments, courts, prosecutors' offices, social programs, and others

In 1994, 62% of VAWA money was dedicated to the legal system. By 2013, this rose to 84%. In 2017, \$250 million was sent directly to courts, police, and prosecutors. It funded the hiring of approximately 100,000 new police officers. Importantly, when VAWA funding is cut, typically social programs are cut, not police departments. With an average allotment for VAWA grants hovering around \$400 million annually, \$143 million on average goes to STOP (Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors) Grants and \$33 million on average goes to Arrest Grants. These encourage state, local, and tribal governments and courts to treat intimate partner violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking as serious crimes with coordinated involvement of the entire legal system.

VAWA originally provided funding for states that enacted "mandatory arrests" in intimate partner violence cases. VAWA later dropped the "mandatory" provision to "pro-arrest." As of 2010, however, no states with mandatory arrest provisions had eliminated them. This kind of mandate disempowers survivors and victims.

