

**Break** the Cycle**Empowering Youth to End
Domestic Violence**

December 22, 2008

P.O. Box 21034
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: 202.824.0707
Fax: 202.824.0747

Ms. Evan Ryan
Ms. Louisa Terrell
Ms. Terrell McSweeney
The Obama-Biden Transition Team
Office of the Vice President Elect
450 5th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001-2739

Dear Ms. Ryan, Ms. Terrell and Ms. McSweeney:

Thank you for the opportunity to put forth information about the needs of teen dating violence victims in our nation and ways in which the incoming Administration can effectively address the issue. Youth dating violence involves physical abuse, sexual violence, emotional abuse and stalking, especially through the use and misuse of technology.

As you may know Break the Cycle is the oldest and one of the only organizations in the country to focus exclusively on dating violence and its impact on young people ages 12 to 24. We have experience in providing direct legal services to teen victims, developing curricula and conducting prevention education in schools and youth groups, developing and analyzing legislation and policy initiatives to address the needs of teen victims, and providing technical assistance and training to service providers throughout the nation. It is through our broad experience with this population that we put forth the following key recommendations.

Administrative Leadership

- The White House should have a high level advisor or liaison on violence against women and girls that includes a focus on teen dating violence in addition to domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking. This advisor or liaison should have the responsibility of working with the various federal agencies to ensure wrap-around policies, prevention efforts and services addressing dating violence experienced by tweens (10-12 year-olds) and teens.

Agency Leadership

- The Office on Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice should have greater expertise and programming on teen dating violence, teen sexual violence and teen stalking. OVV has traditionally had a strong focus on domestic violence in the adult population. That expertise and focus should be broadened to reflect all of the areas covered by the Violence Against Women Act, including dating violence and a specific focus on the needs of teen victims. Greater technical assistance should be provided to service providers on meeting the needs of teen victims.
- The Office on Victims of Crime in the Department of Justice should also incorporate greater expertise and programming around teen dating violence prevention and intervention, especially in relation to at-risk youth and youth in the juvenile justice system.



Additional focus should be placed on intimate partner stalking of teens through the use of technology.

- The Department of Education should have a high level office working with Safe and Drug Free Schools and other programs to effectively address dating violence in middle schools and high schools, including the development of school policies and procedures for addressing dating violence perpetrators and victims, adequate training, technical assistance and support for school personnel, and effective connection to appropriate community services. Additionally, the Department of Education should incorporate age-appropriate dating violence prevention education and education on healthy relationships throughout all schools. Children, tweens and teens need prevention education on all forms of dating violence, as well as education on healthy relationships.
- The Department of Health and Human Services should have a high level person focusing on working with various offices within HHS and outside of HHS to provide teen dating violence prevention and services broadly. Moreover, there should be a specialized focus on teen dating violence prevention and intervention in groups of teens that often fall through the cracks in the system including: runaway and homeless youth; foster care youth; youth in the juvenile justice system; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer youth; and immigrant youth.

Collaborative Efforts

- The Department of Education should work collaboratively with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Justice Department to ensure wrap around policies, education, technical assistance, and services to address teen dating violence. As already discussed above, all of these departments should have high level people focusing on teen dating violence
- All governmental departments that work with youth in any way should have programming on healthy relationships and assistance in preventing and intervening with teen dating violence. This includes the Department of Defense schools and Department of Labor youth employment programs. Education should be a key element in schools but should also reach youth through other means including youth groups, social services, the juvenile justice system, poverty and homelessness programming, and the faith community.

Funding

- The Violence Against Women Act should be fully funded at \$683 million annually, including full funding for STARY (Services to Advocate for and Respond to Youth) - \$15 million, STEP (Supporting Teens through Education and Protection) - \$5 million, Access to Justice for Youth - \$5 million, Grants to Reduce Violent Crimes Against Women on Campus \$15 million, Services for Children and Youth Exposed to Violence - \$20 million, and Engaging Men and Youth in Prevention Efforts - \$10 million. Moreover, funding for these programs should be expanded in future authorizing legislation.
- The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act should be reauthorized and fully funded at \$225 million, including funding for prevention efforts.
- A funding stream for addressing healthy relationships education and teen dating violence prevention and intervention programs in schools should be created through the Department of Education. Such funding also should be used to provide technical



assistance and training to schools and school personnel on how to effectively address teen dating violence.

Break the Cycle greatly appreciates the opportunity to share our recommendations for addressing teen dating violence in the new Administration. We look forward to working with you to provide continued guidance on implementing these recommendations in a manner that will be effective in preventing teen dating violence, providing appropriate interventions and services and holding abusers accountable. Please feel free to contact me at 202-824-0707x229 or juley.fulcher@breakthecycle.org if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Juley Fulcher
Director of Policy Programs