

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Two-Spirit Leaders Call on Washington to Include Native Women in the Re-Authorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

(New York, NY) Two-Spirit leaders from 12 different states called upon the two principle negotiators of the re-authorization the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Vice-President Biden and Rep. Eric Cantor, to include Native women. This action was taken in light of news reports that Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va) was supportive of this bill as long as one key provision was removed: the protection for Native American women.

The Two-Spirit leadership asked for tribal criminal jurisdiction over non-Indian offenders who commit acts of domestic violence or violate protection orders against our Native women; clarifying tribal civil authority to issue and enforce protection orders regardless of the nationality, race or sex of the offender; and for Federal criminal offenses to be made consistent with model domestic violence laws.

Within hours of sending their letter, Lynn Rosenthal, a White House Advisor to Vice-President Biden, responded, "The Vice President is working hard to get an agreement on VAWA that includes criminal jurisdiction and protects all victims."

Later today, the same group of Two-Spirit leaders will call on the members of congressional Black, Hispanic, Asian Pacific American, Native American, and Progressive Caucuses to stand with our Native women.

Native women experience domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking at crisis levels. According to United States Justice Department, rates of domestic violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women are among the highest in the United States when compared to other ethnicities. Nearly half of all Native American women-- 46 percent-- have experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner. One in three Indian women will, at some point in her life, experience the violence and trauma of rape. On some reservations Native American women are murdered at a rate more than 10 times the national average.

"We must do everything in our power to protect our Native women; enabling them to feel safe and for them to hold their heads high as valued, proud and strong Native women," said Harlan Pruden of the NorthEast Two-Spirit Society.

Dr. Karina L. Walters, the principal investigator of a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded health survey of Two-Spirit Native Americans (**R01 MH 65871-05**), found that Native women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or "two-spirit" appear to experience disproportionate levels of violence and may be particularly vulnerable to disparities in health outcomes.

"A disturbingly high prevalence of both sexual (85%) and physical (78%) assault, both of which were associated with worse overall mental and physical health," said Dr. Walters.

List of Endorsing Organizations:

Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits (San Francisco, CA); **Central Oklahoma Two Spirit Natives** (Oklahoma City, OK); **Indiana Two-Spirit Society** (Bloomington, IN) ; **Indigenous Peoples Task Force** (Minneapolis, MN); **Montana Two-Spirit Society** (Browning, MT); **Navajo AIDS Network** (Chinle, AZ); **NorthEast Two-Spirit Society** (New York, NY); **Northwest Two-Spirit Society** (Seattle, WA); **Texas Two Spirit Society** (Dallas, TX); **Two-Spirit Society of Denver** (Denver, CO); **Tulsa Two-Spirit Society** (Tulsa, OK); **Wichita Two-Spirit Society** (Wichita, KS) and Dr. Karina Walters, **Indigenous Wellness Research Institute**, at the University of Washington (Seattle, WA), and **Native Youth Sexual Health Network** (Oneida, WI).