



March 10, 2021

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Jackson Lee, Fitzpatrick, and Nadler:

Ujima Inc., The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community (Ujima, Inc.) is pleased to support H.R.1620, the bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021. Ujima, Inc. is a national Culturally Specific Services Issue Resource Center that mobilizes the Black community and allies through its education and outreach; training and technical assistance; resource development; research; and public policy efforts. We work with local, state, and national partners to promote strategies to improve responses to Black survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and community violence. We appreciated the opportunity to give voice to the needs of Black survivors during the collaborative process of H.R. 1585 and we are encouraged to see the enhancements in H.R. 1620 as COVID-19, racial justice movements, and economic strife have presented complex challenges for those we serve since the passage of H.R. 1585 in 2019.

Since 1994, the Violence Against Women Act has made significant shifts in the cultural and legal landscape for prevention and intervention strategies to address gender-based violence. Specialized courts, prosecution units, law enforcement departments, community-based programs, coordinated community responses, and discretionary grant funding for innovative solutions have been the central tenets of ground-breaking legislation to save lives. However, [Black women still experience the highest rates of homicide](#) related to intimate partner violence compared to other racial and ethnic populations. In 2018, [Black females were murdered by males at a rate nearly three times higher](#) than white females. Despite the prevalence of domestic violence, Black survivors are less likely to seek help from systems-based stakeholders because institutional bias coupled with racial loyalty/collectivism directly impact how she perceives, reacts to, and reports violence in her life. Institutionalized and internalized oppression at the intersections of race and gender have created the foundation for unrecognized, unaddressed trauma and violence in the lives of Black women and they have been denied adequate resources and access to legal systems, funding, crisis services, and other programs.

Thank you for not only hearing the needs of Black survivors, but also addressing them in H.R.1620 which provides measured enhancements for the bipartisan support and passage of such critical provisions as strengthening and enforcing public housing protections, improving access to healthcare options, expanding civil legal representation, promoting firearm surrender protocols, reducing bench warrants for victims who fear to appear in court, creating restorative practices that are solutions-based, expanding tribal sovereignty over specific crimes committed by non-Native perpetrators, and prioritizing sexual assault prevention to ameliorate intervention.



Additionally, the following provisions will greatly improve services for Black survivors and we deeply appreciate the inclusion of:

- a \$40 million authorization for the Culturally Specific Services Program;
- economic justice programs that include access to unemployment insurance; and
- protections for all survivors accessing services thereby preventing discrimination.

Thank you for your unyielding and tireless efforts and bringing the margins to the center to ensure that VAWA, after twenty-seven years, continues to prioritize the safety of survivors and hold perpetrators accountable in a way that is survivor-centered, honors self-determination, and reduces re-victimization by systems. We are deeply moved by your commitment to social change that promotes access to services and justice for all people, and we embrace the opportunity to stand with you.

We are available to assist you at any time to facilitate the passage of this landmark bipartisan bill that is the hallmark of our work. Please do not hesitate to contact me at kcottman@ujimacommunity.org or Gretta Gardner, Deputy Director, at ggardner@ujimacommunity.org at any time.

Respectfully,

Karma Cottman
Executive Director