Statement of the Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary, Regarding S. 47, the "Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013"

Tuesday, February 26, 2013, at 3:00 pm
H-313 Capitol

Since 1994, the Violence Against Women Act has provided critical lifesaving assistance for women, men, and children.

On two occasions since its enactment, members of the House and Senate have worked on a bipartisan basis to extend VAWA's protections and make necessary improvements.

But VAWA's reauthorization lapsed 17 months ago, in the Fall of 2011. Since then, this body has put politics ahead of policy. This is unacceptable and we need to act.

The need for prompt action, however, does not justify the House undertaking a measure that falls well short of what is needed to ensure the effectiveness of this program.

The measure that this committee now proposes to advance to the House floor is a watered down and dangerous version of the strong bipartisan bill that passed the Senate by a vote of 78 to 22, and with the support of every woman in the Senate.

The Senate-passed bill incorporates years of analysis of the problem, and solutions proposed by law enforcement, victims, and victim service providers.

It includes long overdue protections to ensure all victims of violence can access life saving services and it makes important improvements to the program.

Unfortunately, the Majority now proposes to significantly weaken the Senate-passed bill with a substitute that has been drafted behind closed doors, without committee process, and without the input of a single House Democrat.

For example, the Majority's substitute amendment strips important protections for immigrants, tribal members, Alaskan native women and members of the LGBT community. We have been given no reason why the Majority has decided these individuals are not deserving of protection.

The Majority's substitute also fails to include Senate-passed provisions intended to protect college students even though there are extensive studies showing that 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted during their college years.

Specifically, the Majority substitute eliminates important provisions that would require colleges to keep students safe and informed about policies on sexual assault. These provisions would also require institutions to develop and strengthen programs to combat and prevent violent sexual crimes on college campuses.

In addition, the Republican substitute omits the Safer Act, which would provide law enforcement with critical resources needed to ensure that perpetrators of sexual violence are brought to justice. Why leave these provisions out?

Accordingly, I urge the Committee to consider making in order an amendment coauthored by my colleagues Representative Gwen Moore, Louise Slaughter and myself that restores to S. 47 the text of the bipartisan Senate passed bill.

Victims of violence, and the practitioners and advocates who serve them, deserve a straight up or down vote on this critical legislation. If the will of the House is to reject the bipartisan Senate language that protects all victims of violence, then members can vote it down. But don't we deserve a vote?

I thank the Committee Members for their consideration and I yield back my time.