



## Public Policy News March 2016

Here's the "Issue of the Month" plus other news—please share with your branch members. Also—a reminder that March is Women's History Month; International Women's Day is March 8.

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### Issue of the Month: Violence Against Women

You may wonder how violence against women ties into our program year theme of economic security, but the reality is that violence prevents many women from achieving the security they need and results in high social and economic costs. Violence is a public health threat; injuries may keep women off the job or unable to care for themselves and their families. The federal Violence Against Women Act, first enacted in 1994, was most recently reauthorized in 2013. (Vice President Joe Biden, the original sponsor in 1994, made a moving appeal at the Feb. 28 Oscars ceremony for ending violence, followed by Lady Gaga's performance of "Til it Happens to You.")

While VAWA has provided a comprehensive approach to this issue, there is much work still to be done. Often the results of violence are fatal or result in severe injuries or unintended pregnancies. We've learned that many of the women and girls who are trafficked or engage in prostitution were first sexually abused. In addition to intimate partner (domestic) violence, there are the areas of military violence and campus sexual harassment and sexual violence.

Three bills pending in the Ohio legislature will be highlighted at the **Women United for Change** legislative event on April 20. They are **House Bill 359**, which would enable victims to conceal their residential addresses and decrease the likelihood of their abuser finding them; **House Bill 362**, which would recognize strangulation as a highly lethal criminal act and provide a felony level penalty when it has occurred; and **Senate Bill 76**, which would allow for the prosecution of a violation of a protection order, even though the order may not have been personally served (abusers find ways to avoid personal service).

AAUW's Quick Facts on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in School describes the problem in schools and on college campuses, and lists resources for branches, including the Ending Campus Sexual Assault Tool Kit, [www.aauw.org/resource/campus-sexual-assault-too-kit](http://www.aauw.org/resource/campus-sexual-assault-too-kit). Branches located in college towns are encouraged to take advantage of these resources.

Violence in the military was addressed at our last convention, when the survivor featured in the 2012 documentary, **The Invisible War**, spoke movingly about her experiences. This film is available through Amazon and other sources, and brings home the reality of a too-common situation.

Last, another stirring program featured at a recent state convention, the **Silent Witness Project**, honors murder victims of domestic violence. In Ohio, you can find more information through the Women's Center at Bowling Green State University, email [womencenter@bgsu.edu](mailto:womencenter@bgsu.edu).

### **Congressional Redistricting Proposal Stalled**

Efforts have stalled to place a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to change Ohio's congressional redistricting to a process similar to the revised process adopted for state legislative redistricting this past November. By now, we all understand that fair districts equal fair elections, and appreciate the need to move forward. Please call Ohio Speaker Cliff Rosenberger at **614-466-3506** and ask him to expedite placing the amendment on the fall ballot. More information is available at [www.fairdistrictsohio.org](http://www.fairdistrictsohio.org).

### **School Report Cards Confusing**

The long-awaited school report cards, the first to include new Common Core Standards and based on the PARCC tests, were released in late February. The data had been expected to be confusing and were in fact confusing; the definition of student proficiency had changed from its original meaning; most schools' performance index scores were expected to be lower than the previous year's.

It's been reported that 607 of Ohio's 609 school districts had lower performance index scores from the previous year (2013-14); it's also reported that the Department of Education rated students as proficient that would not be in other states. Nevertheless, the districts are exempted by the legislature from penalties for poor scores in this year and next, during the transition phase to the new standards and tests.

PARCC was fired by the General Assembly after complaints about the testing process last year. The new test provider is the American Institutes for Research, which had been the provider of the Ohio Graduation Tests. The entire issue is still controversial, and there is still concern about students opting out of the tests. AAUW had been supportive of the PARCC tests as a civil rights issue to determine equality of opportunity. We will be watching to see how this issue develops.

### **New Map of Human Trafficking Coalitions**

Many of our branches have been concerned with human trafficking issues and continue to be supportive of efforts on behalf of survivors. This new map shows that most of Ohio is now covered by anti-trafficking coalitions. Go to [www.publicsafety.ohio.gov/ht/coalitions](http://www.publicsafety.ohio.gov/ht/coalitions) to see the service areas and the names of the coalitions.

### **Key Dates**

**April 8-9:** Annual state convention, Columbus/Worthington. Public policy sessions will feature Innovation Ohio speakers on the Women's Public Policy Network and Public Policy Agenda, and the president of Restart, a work-release advocacy program for first-time female offenders.

**April 12:** Equal Pay Day. Check out the branch resources at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org).

**April 20:** Women United for Change, Columbus. Seventeen women's organizations are holding this legislative event to highlight bills affecting women's health, economic status, and safety. Watch for details coming soon.

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