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## Senate

### Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

#### *“Domestic Violence in America”*

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, today I rise with my colleague Senator Kyl to commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month and to pay tribute to the millions of victims of domestic violence in the United States: both those who daily face fear and pain at the hands of the ones they love, and those who have had the courage to seek help.

Domestic violence causes far more pain than the visible marks of bruises and scars. It is devastating to be abused by someone that you love and think loves you in return. It is estimated that approximately 3 million incidents of domestic violence are reported each year in the United States. Tragically, domestic violence remains a pervasive threat to the fabric of America's families and the well-being of America's future.

Around the world, one out of three women is abused by their domestic partner or another member of their family. This means that each of us probably knows at least one victim of domestic abuse.

It is primarily a crime against women, who account for approximately eighty-five percent of domestic abuse victims each year. Indeed, nearly one-third of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives, and each year as many as 324,000 women experience domestic violence during their pregnancy.

It is truly heartbreaking to hear these victims' stories and to know that so many women and even some men face this pain on a regular basis.

Domestic violence does not only happen to adults. Forty percent of girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend, and approximately one in five female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. And these are only the cases that are reported.

Additionally, many children are caught in the middle, witnessing abuse or being abused themselves. Domestic violence is witnessed by

between 3.3 and 10 million children every year. And, studies show that half of all men who frequently assault their wives also frequently abuse their children. The emotional impact of this abuse during childhood can have a devastating effect on the rest of a person's life.

Domestic abuse creates a cycle of violence. Children who are abused or witness abuse are at a higher risk of abusing their own family and significant others as an adult as well as long-term physical and mental health problems, including alcohol and substance abuse.

It is evident that these abuse victims follow the example they learned in childhood and continue the cycle of violence when they are adults.

Statistics can show us the wide scope of domestic violence, but numbers cannot demonstrate how frightening domestic violence is to a victim. I have read stories of many victims, both men and women, whose lives are changed forever by the fear and pain they feel as

a result of their partner's violent behavior.

Let me talk about just one story I read recently. At first glance, Pam Butler appeared to have the perfect life. She grew up in a stable, loving family in Palo Alto, California. That stability was shattered when she met Michael Braga.

Michael Braga was a charismatic but troubled man who quickly romanced Pam Butler. He began to control every aspect of her life: limiting her contact with friends and family, controlling her money and living space and chipping away at her self-confidence. This behavior quickly escalated into violence.

Pam was beaten unconscious on several occasions. She painfully learned to hide the signs of the beatings because she was ashamed to be in such a horrible situation.

After several beatings caused re-injury to an old skull fracture, Pam Butler realized that staying in the relationship could kill her. She enlisted the help of Santa Clara County Assistant District Attorney Joyce Allegro.

I am pleased to report that Mr. Braga was arrested and prosecuted. Following his trial, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison, one of the longest sentences for domestic violence passed down in California history.

As a result of her experiences with domestic violence, Pam Butler has

devoted many hours to assisting other victims. She is the Domestic Violence Victim Advocate for the County of Santa Clara's Social Services Agency. She has also spoken about domestic violence across the United States. Her story is an inspiration to every person who has been a victim of domestic violence.

Another heartbreaking story is that of Michele, a Chicago woman who had been abused just as her mother and grandmother had before her. Michele's father hit and insulted her throughout her upbringing. Unfortunately, Michele was not able to break the cycle of violence and fell into the same trap as her mother and grandmother.

Her first husband beat her, cheated on her, called her insulting names and controlled her ability to come and go from her house. Although she was well-read and bright, Michele did not believe she had the ability to escape this horrible situation.

Ultimately, her husband left her and her children, and she continued the cycle of violence with other abusive men. Eventually, she and her children found themselves homeless. Only then did she realize that she could get help. Michele now encourages other victims to seek help and speak out against domestic violence.

It is vital that we act to stop the cycle of domestic violence. To this end, last April the Senate passed the Victims' Rights Act by a vote of 96 to 1.

I am proud to have been a long-time supporter and co-sponsor of this important legislation. The Act amends the federal criminal code to expand the rights of victims, especially the protection of victims of domestic violence, during the course of an alleged offender's trial and imprisonment.

This is landmark legislation in its ability to ensure the rights of all victims, but it is especially important for victims of domestic abuse. The Victims' Rights Act assures victims the right to be reasonably protected from the accused. It guarantees the right to reasonable, accurate and timely notice of any public proceeding involving the crime, as well as any release or escape of the accused offender. And it protects the victim's right to be treated with fairness and with respect for his or her dignity and privacy.

The Victims' Rights Act is one of the most important pieces of legislation that I have had the privilege of supporting during my twelve years in the Senate. It is currently before the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, and I strongly encourage the House to take it up soon.

In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to honor the victims of domestic violence and to call for an end to the cycle of violence. It is my sincere hope that we will all know peace and security in our own homes. Thank you.