

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Attorney's Office in the USVI Commemorates April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

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A release issued Tuesday says that every April, the Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney's Office for the U.S. Virgin Islands join survivors, advocates, and communities nationwide in observing Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.

"Sexual violence is far too prevalent, and it is important to not only raise awareness of the myriad forms of sexual violence, but to engage in meaningful prevention efforts, take action to hold offenders accountable, and to care for survivors in a trauma-informed manner," says the release.

It adds, "U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert joins the Department of Justice and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) in applauding the recent passage of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2022 (VAWA 2022), which treats sexual assault as the serious violation it is and creates new programs and initiatives that provide survivors of sexual violence with increased access to services and justice."

According to the release, VAWA 2022 expands outreach to survivors in underserved communities, including by improving access to sexual assault medical forensic examinations for survivors in rural areas, providing community-specific services for LGBT survivors, and restoring Native American tribes' jurisdiction to prosecute non-Indian perpetrators of sexual violence and sex trafficking, among certain other offenses committed on tribal lands.

"Sexual assaults are repulsive acts of violence. They are criminal offenses, and they must be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent permitted by law," said Shappert. "Absolutely no one should live in fear of being sexually assaulted or of being retaliated against for reporting a sexual assault."

"During Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, and every month, OVW-funded programs across the nation provide essential services to survivors of sexual assault, responding to their needs, helping them heal, and supporting them as they pursue the justice they seek," said OVW Principal Deputy Director Allison Randall. "The impact of sexual violence is felt by the entire community and can devastate survivors' lives, which is why it is critical that VAWA 2022 strengthens not just services and justice interventions but also prevention."

The release states that OVW funds resources in every jurisdiction, to include the U.S. Virgin Islands. During FY21, OVW awarded \$978,810 to the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands which included \$270,782 to the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council (VIDVSAC). VIDVSAC is a nonprofit organization specializing in domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence and child abuse education.

"VIDVSAC provides invaluable support to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault-related offenses here in the Territory," Shappert said. "VIDVSAC also sponsors important training and outreach initiatives to educate everyone about the consequences of these serious crimes."

The U.S. Department of Justice OVW provides leadership in developing the nation's capacity to reduce violence through the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act and subsequent legislation. Created in 1995, OVW administers financial and technical assistance to communities across the country that are developing programs, policies and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. In addition to overseeing federal grant programs, OVW undertakes initiatives in response to special needs identified by communities facing acute challenges. Learn more at www.justice.gov/ovw.