

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-new-protection-for-gays-and-lesbians>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

In a step toward equality, the [Department of Justice recently concluded](#) that federal prosecutors should enforce criminal provisions in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in cases involving gay and lesbian relationships. Why is this important? VAWA, passed in 1994 and re-authorized in 2000 and 2005, provides unprecedented access to services for victims of intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence occurs at a similar rate within gay and lesbian relationships as it does within heterosexual relationships. Like other marginalized communities, gay and lesbian victims of intimate partner violence do not have consistent access to victim services that are attuned to their needs. [A recent report](#), *Why It Matters: Rethinking Victim Assistance for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Victims of Hate Violence and Intimate Partner Violence*, pointed out that not only do law-enforcement agencies often underestimate the levels of violence against these victims, but the victims, fearing discrimination, often hesitate to report the assault or seek victim services.

Issues of justice and equality for gays and lesbians, such as same-sex marriage, continue to provoke intense hostility among conservative politicians and commentators. Consequently, the removal of any barriers to justice and equality for gays and lesbians becomes a monumental task and, when it happens, a significant achievement.

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