Mike’s Plan to Combat Violence Against Women

The figures on violence against women today are disturbing. One in five women has experienced a completed or attempted rape.1 While other violent crime rates have remained flat, the estimated number of sexual assaults in the United States more than doubled between 2014 and 2018.2 A quarter of women have experienced violence by an intimate partner, too often with fatal consequences: fifty-two women are shot and killed by a domestic partner each month.4

The Trump administration is weakening the government’s ability to address violence against women. The president’s Republican colleagues in the Senate have thwarted the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)—the federal government’s primary tool to end violence and support survivors—reversing the decades-long legacy of bipartisan support for the legislation. The administration has called for decreases in funding to the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, which administers VAWA.5 It narrowed the definition of domestic violence - removing psychological, emotional, and economic abuse - denying support services to countless women who have been harmed. And after altering regulations on how colleges respond to student reports of rape, the administration has effectively discouraged young women on campuses from coming forward to share accounts of assault.6

As president, Mike will take immediate steps to reverse the Trump administration’s harmful policies. Mike knows that violence against women has no place in our society. He will ensure that survivors are safe, supported, and given the necessary tools to establish their economic independence. And he will give law enforcement and judges the resources they need to hold perpetrators accountable.


- **Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.** The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is the federal government’s primary tool to protect women against domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. VAWA addresses the immediate needs of survivors by funding organizations that provide physical safety, housing, counseling services and help with children.7 Senate Republicans have stalled the bill’s re-authorization. As president, Mike will work with congress to get VAWA passed, on the model of the House-approved H.R. 1585. He will seek a 200% funding increase for rape prevention services and youth violence prevention education and stronger housing protections for survivors, who are four times more likely to face housing instability than women who have not experienced domestic violence.8

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1 Center for Disease Control, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief, November 2018.
3 Center for Disease Control, National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief, November 2018.
4 Everytown, Guns and Violence Against Women: America’s Uniquely Lethal Intimate Partner Violence Problem, October 2019.
5 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, NCADV Denounces President Trump’s FY’19 Budget Request, February 20, 2018.
• **Restore the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women and increase funding for support services.** VAWA established the DOJ’s Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to lead federal efforts to combat domestic and sexual violence. Since it was founded in 1994, the OVW has administered more than $8 billion in grants to on-the-ground organizations. However, the office’s last report to Congress was completed before Trump entered office. In 2018, the office narrowed the definition of “domestic violence” to exclude emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions. Trump’s budget plans have consistently sought to cut funding for OVW. Mike will reverse the damage the Trump administration has done to the OVW.

• **Expand family justice centers nationally.** As mayor of New York City, Mike pioneered family justice centers, which provide one-stop services for survivors of domestic violence and their children—and make it easier for victims to seek justice. New York City centers had nearly 250,000 client visits in their first nine years and family-related homicides fell 21% during approximately the same period. Mike will increase funding to build more family justice centers across the country.

• **Address economic abuse.** Domestic violence exacts an enormous psychological and physical toll. It comes with huge economic costs, too. One study found that 99% of domestic abuse victims have experienced economic abuse. Three quarters of domestic violence survivors say they stayed with their abuser out of financial necessity. Many victims of domestic violence are blocked by their partners from opening bank accounts or independent credit cards. Another common practice is coerced debt, where a partner saddles a victim with a damaged credit score and passive debt payments. Mike will make sure that economic abuse is included in the Violence Against Women Act’s definition of domestic violence. He will extend Paid Family Leave policy to cover survivors to protect them against losing jobs and will amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to allow victims of coerced debt to repair their credit scores through the family court system. He will also increase federal funding for financial literacy education to help survivors become financially independent.

• **Pass common sense gun legislation.** Fifty-two women are shot and killed by domestic partners each month. Federal domestic violence laws ban abusive husbands, ex-husbands and live-in partners from buying guns. However, the “boyfriend loophole” allows many domestic abusers to have guns, despite criminal convictions or restraining orders – even though American women are as likely to be killed by a boyfriend as a spouse. Mike will close the loophole, extending gun safety laws to cover all intimate partners. He will also work to pass federal legislation to close the Charleston Loophole, which allows gun sales to go forward after three business days – even if the buyer’s background check is not complete. This loophole has a special impact on domestic abusers, because

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9 U.S. Department of Justice, [Office on Violence Against Women](https://www.ojp.gov/).  
16 Ibid.  
investigations of their records can be especially time-intensive, resulting in about 6,700 sales to prohibited abusers from 2006-2015.\textsuperscript{18}

2. **Ensure justice for survivors.**

- **End the federal statute of limitations for sex crimes and amend the federal rules of evidence to allow for broad admission of evidence of prior bad acts in domestic violence cases.** Some states don’t allow prosecutions of sex crimes if even a short amount of time—\textit{as brief as three years}—has passed since the incident.\textsuperscript{19} As president, Mike would sign a law removing the federal statute of limitations for felony sexual assault, ensuring that survivors are able to seek justice. And Mike would sign a law broadening the circumstances under which prosecutors can admit evidence of consistent prior bad acts by a defendant in a sex crimes case—since prior incidents of abuse can be pivotal in cases that hinge on credibility. Mike would encourage states to follow suit.

- **Eliminate the national rape kit backlog.** Too often, law enforcement doesn’t have the funding or infrastructure to test rape kits—and alarmingly, rape allegations are often not taken seriously. Demand for testing has increased 85\% since 2013 and continues to grow, increasing the size of the backlog.\textsuperscript{20} Mike will calculate the scale of the national backlog—estimated to be as high as 200,000 kits\textsuperscript{21}—and will set a goal of eliminating it entirely, with public pressure on states to act, along with funding to test kits and for investigations and prosecutions.

- **Help law enforcement work with survivors of domestic violence.** Domestic violence and sexual assault survivors need the help of mental health and social service professionals as much as they do the police. Mike will help build a model for dispatching social service professionals alongside police, so cities and towns can more effectively respond to domestic violence incidents—including with trauma-informed services for children who witness violence. Mike will fund grants, including from the Community Oriented Policing Services Office, so that police departments can bring in the necessary professionals.

- **Help counties build special units to prosecute people for domestic violence and sexual assault.**

- **Divert survivors away from the criminal justice system.** Girls who have been sexually abused have a higher likelihood of becoming justice-involved than those who weren’t, and 31\% of girls in juvenile justice were sexually abused, compared to 7\% of boys.\textsuperscript{22} Mike will train educators, law enforcement and judges to better identify the signs of abuse and trauma in young girls, keeping them out of the justice system where appropriate. He will encourage states to consider domestic violence and sexual abuse in sentencing recommendations. And he will require states to screen women at intake for sexual exploitation and divert victims away from the justice system.

\begin{footnotesize}


\textsuperscript{20} Washington Post, \textit{Nationwide DNA testing backlog has nearly doubled, despite $1 billion in federal funding}, March 2019.

\textsuperscript{21} The Atlantic, \textit{These Attacks Could’ve Been Prevented}, July 2019

\textsuperscript{22} Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, \textit{The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls’ Story}.
\end{footnotesize}
• **Address sexual assault on campus.** Over a quarter of women in college experience an unwanted sexual encounter at their schools, according to women surveyed by the Association of American Universities. Mike will reverse Trump-era regulations on campus sexual assault that discourage survivors from coming forward – and he will push for guidance that presses schools to adjudicate cases thoroughly. He will sign the Campus Accountability and Safety Act, which requires colleges to have campus coordinators who will connect assault survivors with services and assist with reporting to authorities; sets a uniform process for disciplinary proceedings; streamlines campus communication with police; and stiffens penalties for schools that fail to report incidents to the government. Complete and accurate data reporting on campus sexual assaults is hard to come by. Mike will require colleges to disclose annually all reported student sexual assaults to the Department of Education and OVW.

• **Confront the scourge of military sexual assault, which affects both men and women.** In 2017, 5,277 servicemen and women reported sexual assault, roughly a third of the estimated total number of actual crimes. Mike will require that the Department of Defense (DOD) provide an annual progress report to Congress on efforts to eliminate sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military, including at service academies. His administration will ensure that when an assault is reported, people across both the DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are trained to respond appropriately — from processing complaints to providing medical care to launching an investigation. Victims will be given the option of having an independent military prosecutor take on their case, rather than working through their commanding officer, and all command prosecution decisions will be independently reviewed. Mike will also reform the role of the military’s sexual response coordinators, training them to more effectively help women navigate the reporting process. Additionally, Mike will appoint a White House liaison with military experience to oversee the Electronic Health Record project, which will seamlessly transfer medical service records to the VA system – so that survivors can receive services without having to explain a traumatic history to a new team of medical professionals.

• **End the abuse of women in prison.** Between 2009 and 2011, women represented 7% of the people in jails and prisons, but made up 33% of all victims of sexual assault by staff. In 2003, Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which established a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse in custody and set a national priority for reducing rape. But the law has proved insufficient: investigations are often drawn out, inconclusive, and corrections authorities usually rule against the victims. Mike will strengthen PREA, adding new investigatory requirements, and revising the credibility assessment that considers non-relevant facts in determining the legitimacy of accusations. He will also establish a federal oversight function with DOJ observers who are empowered to take complaints from women, ensure PREA data are reported in full to the federal government, investigate cases of violence and seek to separate abusive officers from the prison population.

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24 DOD, *Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, May 2018
3. Protect vulnerable communities.

- **End bias-motivated attacks against trans women.** Trans women are at extremely high risk for violence: according to the Human Rights Campaign, advocates reported at least 25 homicides of transgender or gender non-conforming people in the U.S. in 2019. The majority of these victims were Black women. Mike will make hate and bias crimes a top federal priority, directing the FBI to take the lead on bias crime investigations, training local authorities to identify hate, pressuring states to report all hate crimes to the federal government and improving data collection on violent deaths of LGBTQ+ people. He will end the LGBTQ+ panic legal defense, a strategy in which defendants charged with assault or murder claim unwanted same-sex sexual advances caused them temporary insanity.

- **Support Native Women.** Over half of American Indian and Alaska Native women have faced sexual violence, and roughly one-third have been raped – almost double the rate for white women. For Native girls and young women ages one to 19, homicide was the third leading cause of death in 2016. Thousands of women are missing. And these alarming figures may not tell the whole story, because data on violence and missing women are incomplete. Mike will work with Congress to expand tribal jurisdiction over crimes committed on tribal lands. Mike will direct DOJ to work with tribes to investigate crimes against indigenous women, and will sign Savanna’s Act – which improves the reporting of crime data on reservations, requires closer cooperation between tribes and U.S. Attorneys on sexual violence and trains and assists tribal police.

- **Asylum seekers.** In June 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a decision that made it more difficult for victims of “private” violence, which includes domestic and gang violence, to seek asylum in the U.S. (this policy is currently being challenged in court). Mike will affirm protections for vulnerable individuals seeking asylum, including those fleeing systemic gang, domestic and identity-based violence. He will ensure that vulnerable women have the opportunity to have their asylum cases heard under international law.

- **Investigate abuse at Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and reform the agency to ensure oversight and accountability.** Since 2017, there have been more than 400 allegations of sexual assault or abuse and at least 29 fatalities in detention facilities overseen by ICE. As president, Mike will order the Department of Justice to launch an investigation into abuse at ICE, and will reform the agency—implementing sensible enforcement priorities around true homeland security objectives, significantly reducing immigrant detention for those who do not pose a threat to

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29 National Institute of Justice, [Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men](https://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/article/141258).
33 Associated Press, Scope of Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women in Idaho Unknown, December 2019
35 Bloomberg Opinion, An Epidemic of Violence Against Native American Women, February 2019
public safety, and establishing clear and effective oversight to ensure transparency and accountability.

- **Establish sensible immigration enforcement priorities that promote public safety and national security.** Many undocumented women are afraid to report sexual assault and domestic violence to local authorities or seek help for fear of deportation. According to the ACLU, 72% of immigrant advocates reported their clients endured regular abuse from partners because they feared going to the authorities. The Trump administration eliminated immigration enforcement priorities, expanding them beyond threats to public safety and national security. As mayor, Mike signed landmark executive orders protecting immigration status as confidential and maintaining a measure of separation between federal immigration enforcement and local law enforcement when public safety was not at risk. A Bloomberg administration will direct the Department of Homeland Security to establish sensible enforcement priorities that promote public safety and national security.

4. **End Sex Trafficking and Support Victims.**

- **Make human trafficking a top federal priority.** Anti-trafficking non-profit Polaris identified nearly 11,000 human trafficking cases in 2018, a 25% jump over the previous year. However, the DOJ investigates and prosecutes only a small fraction of these cases, and that number has declined under the Trump administration. Mike will increase the number of investigations and prosecutions by the Department of Justice, including increased funding and efficacy of existing joint federal and local task forces.

- **Address the nexus of prostitution and sex trafficking.** Sex trafficking and prostitution are inextricably linked. Mike will pilot new interventions to protect women who have been exploited, including diversion programs for women engaging in prostitution. These programs will provide an alternative to incarceration - while still holding their criminal employers accountable. Mike will also consider expanding specialized courts for prostitution cases, modeled on the Queens trafficking court.

- **Encourage states to enact safe harbor laws.** Nineteen states currently allow children under the age of 18 to be arrested for prostitution. Mike will encourage states to adopt the federal standard that considers all children working in prostitution under the age of 18 to be de-facto victims of trafficking. Instead of sending young women to prison, these “safe harbor laws” will connect them to diversion programs.

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39 American Immigration Council, [The end of immigration enforcement priorities under the Trump administration](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/content/end-immigration-enforcement-priorities-under-trump-administration), March 2018.


43 NYT, [In a Queens Court, Women in Prostitution Cases Are Seen as Victims](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/nyregion/in-a-queens-court-women-in-prostitution-cases-are-seen-as-victims.html), November 2014.

5. Hold tech companies accountable for the abuse of women and girls online.

- **Hold tech companies to account when their platforms are used to harass women.** Abuse of women online is rampant. It can take the form of sexual harassment (e.g., unwanted sexual photos and messages); threats of sexual and physical violence; and the unauthorized release of personal information with the intent to cause real-life sexual and physical violence (e.g., doxing, swatting). Tech companies have failed to hold themselves accountable to protecting women from violence online. As president, Mike will enact a national privacy law that will ensure everyone’s data is protected.

- **Protect women against “revenge porn.”** A Pew study found that 10% of young women have had sexually explicit images shared without their consent— a practice commonly known as “revenge porn.” 46 states have laws that make revenge porn a misdemeanor or felony, though these laws differ in definitions and severity of the charge. Mike will work with states to clarify the standards in their existing laws and encourage the remaining 4 states without laws to pass legislation to criminalize the sharing of intimate images without their consent. He will also provide victims of cyber exploitation a civil cause for action against their perpetrators.

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46 Cyber Civil Rights. [46 States + DC + One Territory Now Have Revenge Porn Laws](https://www.cybercivilrights.org/2019/08/30/46-states-dc-one-territory-now-have-revenge-porn-laws/).