

Memorandum

TO: YWCA Leaders
FROM: Caitlin Lowry
DATE: February 8, 2019
SUBJECT: OVW Website and the Definition of Domestic Violence

There has been a lot of misinformation in the media as of late regarding the definition of domestic violence on OVW's website. Please rest assured that **the definition of domestic violence under VAWA has not been changed.**

The various articles you may have been seeing all note that OVW changed the descriptions of DV on their website, which is accurate. Around April 2018, OVW relaunched their website. A page that included a comprehensive description of domestic violence (created by the field, not in the VAWA statutory language) was changed so that it now reflects VAWA's statutory definition of domestic violence. VAWA's definition is narrower than the previous description on the website.

The current federal definitions of DV and SA are essentially the same ones that were in the original VAWA of 1994. For as long as the Department of Justice has been making VAWA grants, grantees (and OVW) have been constrained by these statutory definitions. They are not new.

In the VAWA reauthorization context, we are working with other advocates to expand the definition of domestic violence to better track our field's definition of domestic violence. In this context, the definition relates to the provision of services and should be expanded to reflect the lived experiences of survivors.

We are not sure how a change in OVW's website in April 2018 has become a news story in Winter 2019. As far as we have been able to discern, **OVW's website change has not, in any way, altered how OVW is operating or instructing its grantees to operate.** We will continue to monitor this situation and push for a broader definition in the reauthorization context.