

Making it more difficult to file bankruptcy and regain economic stability afterwards.

Pitting women and children who are trying to collect child support against powerful commercial companies trying to collect credit card and other debts.

Punishing honest low income bankruptcy filers while providing cover for individuals convicted of violating FACE (clinic violence protections).

We cannot support a bill that uses VAWA to provide cover for legislation that also hurts women. S. 2787 can be passed under Unanimous Consent today. Please just do it.

Sincerely,

PATRICIA BLAU REUSS,
Vice President, Government Relations.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER,
NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR
WOMEN & FAMILIES,

September 17, 1999.

Re: S. 625, The "Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999"

DEAR SENATOR: The undersigned women's and children's organizations write to urge you to oppose S. 625, the "Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1999."

Hundreds of thousands of women and their children are affected by the bankruptcy system each year as debtors and creditors. Indeed, women are the fastest growing group in bankruptcy. In 1999, over half a million women are expected to file for bankruptcy by themselves—more than men filing by themselves or married couples. About 200,000 of these women filers will be trying to collect child support or alimony. Another 200,000 women owed child support or alimony by men who file for bankruptcy will become bankruptcy creditors.

S. 625 puts both groups of economically vulnerable women and children at greater risk. By increasing the rights of many creditors, including credit card companies, finance companies, auto lenders and others, the bill would set up a competition for scarce resources between parents and children owed child support and commercial creditors both during and after bankruptcy. And single parents facing financial crises—often caused by divorce, nonpayment of support, loss of a job, uninsured medical expenses, or domestic violence—would find it harder to regain their economic stability through the bankruptcy process. The bill would make it harder for these parents to meet the filing requirements; harder, if they got there, to save their homes, cars, and essential household items; and harder to meet their children's needs after bankruptcy because many more debts would survive.

Contrary to the claims of some, the domestic support provisions included in the bill would not solve these problems. The provisions only relate to the collection of support during bankruptcy from a bankruptcy filer; they do nothing to alleviate the additional hardships the bill would create for the hundreds of thousands of women forced into bankruptcy themselves. And even for women who are owed support by men who file for bankruptcy, the provisions fail to ensure that support payments will come first, ahead of the increased claims of the commercial creditors. Some improvement were made in the domestic support provisions in the Judiciary Committee. However, even the revised provisions fail to solve the problems created by the rest of the bill, which gives many other creditors greater claims—both during and after bankruptcy—than they have under current law. The bill does not ensure that, in this intensified competition for the debtor's limited resources, parents and children owed support will prevail over the sophisticated collection departments of these powerful interests.

This Bankruptcy Reform Act will reduce the ability of parents to pay their most important debt—their debt to their children. It is for these reasons that we strongly oppose S. 625 and urge you to oppose it as well.

Very truly yours,

National Women's Law Center.
National Partnership for Women & Families.

ACES, Association for Children for Enforcement of Support, Inc.

American Association of University Women.

American Medical Women's Association.
Business and Professional Women/USA.
Center for Law and Social Policy.
Center for the Advancement of Public Policy.

Center for the Child Care Workforce.
Church Women United.
Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW).
Equal Rights Advocates.
Feminist Majority.
Hadassah.

International Women's Insolvency & Restructuring Confederation ("IWIRC").

National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW).

National Black Women's Health Project.
National Center for Youth Law.

National Council of Jewish Women.
National Council of Negro Women.

National Organization for Women.
National Women's Conference.

Northwest Women's Law Center.
NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Wider Opportunities for Women.
The Women Activist Fund.

Women Employed.
Women Work!

Women's Institute for Freedom of Press.
Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc.

YWCA of the U.S.A.

CONTINUING CLIMATE OF FEAR IN BELARUS

Mr. CAMPBELL. Mr. President, as co-chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I take this opportunity to update my colleagues on the situation in Belarus, as I have done on previous occasions.

The Belarusian parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 15, and unfortunately, they do not meet the basic commitments outlined by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concerning free and democratic elections. Moreover, many observers have concluded that the Belarusian government has not made real progress in fulfilling four criteria for international observation of the elections: respect for human rights and an end to the climate of fear; opposition access to the state media; a democratic electoral code; and the granting of real power to the parliament that will be chosen in these elections.

Instead, the Helsinki Commission has observed that the Lukashenka regime launched a campaign of intensified harassment in recent days directed against members of the opposition. We have received reports that just last week, Anatoly Lebedka, leader of the United Civic Party, whom many of my colleagues met when he visited the Senate last year, was roughed up by police after attending an observance marking the first anniversary of the

disappearance of a leading member of the democratic opposition Viktor Gonchar and his associate, Anatoly Krasovsky. And just a few days ago, we were informed that Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Viachorka's request for air time on Belarusian television to explain why the opposition is boycotting the parliamentary elections was met with a hateful, disparaging diatribe on the main newscast "Panorama."

This is only the tip of the iceberg—in addition, the Helsinki Commission is receiving reports of detentions, fines and instances of beatings of opposition activists who are promoting a boycott of the elections by distributing leaflets or other literature or holding meetings with voters. In recent weeks, we have also been informed of the refusal to register many opposition candidates on dubious grounds; the seizure of over 100,000 copies of the independent trade union newspaper "Rabochy"; forceful disruptions of public meetings with representatives of the opposition; an apparent burglary of the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party; a ban of the First Festival of Independent Press in Vitebsk, and recent "reminder letters" by the State Committee on Press for independent newspapers to re-register.

Mr. President, Belarusian opposition parties supporting the boycott have received permission to stage "Freedom March III" this Sunday, October 1. At a number of past demonstrations, police have detained, harassed and beaten participants. Those in Congress who are following developments in Belarus are hopeful that this demonstration will take place peacefully, that authorities do not limit the rights of Belarusian citizens to freedom of association and assembly, and that the Government of Belarus will refrain from acts of repression against the opposition and others who openly advocate for a boycott of these elections.

Mr. President, the Helsinki Commission continue to monitor closely the events surrounding these elections and we will keep the full Senate apprized of developments in the ongoing struggle for democracy in Belarus.

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, it is not even one month into the school year and yet school is canceled for the week at Carter C. Woodson Middle School in New Orleans, Louisiana. On Tuesday afternoon, a 13-year-old boy, who had been expelled from school for fighting, allegedly slipped another 13-year-old a .38-caliber revolver. The expelled teen was seen passing the handgun through the school fence to the other 13-year-old, who allegedly used the gun to shoot a 15-year-old schoolmate. According to witnesses, the 15-year-old then managed to get the gun from his attacker and return gunfire.