

WASHINGTON - Victims of domestic violence frequently find it difficult to leave abusive relationships because of the financial hardships they'll face on their own. However, a pilot program proposed by U.S. Rep. Ed Pastor, D-Ariz., may bring help to such victims.

Pastor recently introduced the Employment Assistance for Victims of Domestic Abuse Act of 2007, or H.R. 3576, which would help assist victims of domestic violence through a limited demonstration program that could later be expanded to include more participants.

H.R. 3576 proposes to provide small business employers with a one-year tax incentive for hiring victims of domestic violence. The tax incentive is designed to help open the door to independence for persons with little or no previous employment history by giving them the opportunity to learn a trade and develop a proven work record, Pastor said. It targets small businesses for the explicit purpose of assisting local companies and enterprises that frequently operate on narrow profit margins.

"I see this as a great benefit not only for victims of domestic violence, but for mom-and-pop operations to lower their operating costs while also enjoying the benefit of hard-working and eager employees," said Pastor.

As a pilot program open to persons living in Department of Justice funded transitional housing for victims of domestic violence, this program would dovetail into an existing set of employer tax incentives known as 'Work Opportunity Credits.' These programs already assist such groups as veterans, high-risk youth, and Social Security Income recipients.

"While the program will initially be limited to the residents of roughly 50 or 60 transition housing centers nationwide, I am optimistic we will see it blossom into more areas in the near future," explained Pastor, "giving victims a new lease on life that is free of fear."

The bill also contains a reporting requirement for the Secretary of the Treasury so that the success of the program can be gauged for possible future expansion.

The bill was introduced on Sept. 18 and has been sent to the House Committee on Ways and Means.