

October 14, 2015

Dear Senator,

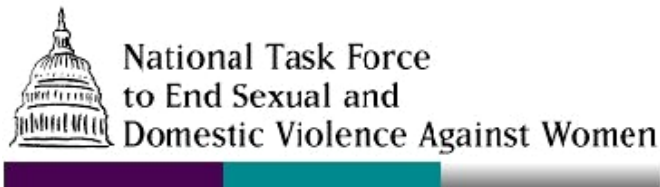
As the Steering Committee of the National Taskforce to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF), comprising national leadership organizations advocating on behalf of sexual and domestic violence victims and women's rights, we represent hundreds of organizations across the country dedicated to ensuring **all** survivors of violence receive the protections they deserve. For this reason, we write to express our deep concerns about the impact that **S. 2146**, the "Stop Sanctuary Policies and Protect Americans Act," will have on communities with "sanctuary" policies. Such legislation will be dangerous for all victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and trafficking, and in particular, for immigrant victims, and communities at large.

S. 2146 undermines policies that local jurisdictions have determined are Constitutionally sound and appropriate for their respective communities, and it decreases the ability of law enforcement agencies to respond to violent crimes and assist **all** victims of crime, U.S. Citizens, and immigrants alike. As recognized in the bipartisan Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), law enforcement plays a critical role in our coordinated community response to domestic and sexual violence. Law enforcement funds support critical training, equipment, and agency staffing that assists domestic and sexual violence victims. Provisions in **S. 2146** that reduce funding for law enforcement agencies will allow violent crimes to go uninvestigated and leave victims without redress.

In addition, provisions in **S.2146** seek to reduce Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to communities with "sanctuary" policies, which will harm communities by reducing access to critical housing and community services that are accessed by **all** victims, including both U.S. Citizens and immigrants.

Community trust policies are critical tools for increasing community safety. We recently celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of VAWA, which has, since it was first enacted, included critical protections for immigrant victims of domestic and sexual violence. Laws that seek to intertwine the immigration and law enforcement systems will undermine the Congressional purpose of protections enacted under VAWA and will have the chilling effect of pushing immigrant victims into the shadows and allow criminals to walk on our streets. As VAWA recognizes, immigrant victims of violent crimes often do not contact law enforcement due to fear that they will be deported. According to a study conducted by the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza, 45% of the foreign-born callers expressed fear of calling and/or seeking help from the police or courts.¹ Furthermore, 12% of US-Born callers expressed fear of seeking help due to the current wave of anti-immigrant policies. Immigrants are already afraid of contacting the police and these policies will only exacerbate this fear.

¹ http://www.nationallatinonetwork.org/images/files/HotlineReport_2_2015_Final.pdf;
<http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/7112130?>; <http://nomore.org/nomas/>



Perpetrators use fear of deportation as abuse. Local policies that minimize intertwining of local law enforcement with ICE help bring the most vulnerable victims out of the shadows by creating trust between law enforcement and the immigrant community, which in turn help protect ***entire*** communities.² Abusers and traffickers use the fear of deportation of their victims as a tool to silence and trap them. Not only are the individual victims harmed, but their fear of law enforcement leads many to abstain from reporting violent perpetrators or coming forward, and, as a result, dangerous criminals are not identified and go unpunished. These criminals remain on the streets and continue to be a danger to our communities.

S. 2146's harsh criminal penalties will harm victims of trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Immigrant victims are vulnerable to being arrested and prosecuted for crimes directly connected to their victimization. For example, victims of domestic violence are arrested and convicted of domestic violence related crimes, even when they are not the primary perpetrator of violence in the relationship, due to language and cultural barriers. In addition, victims of sex trafficking are often arrested and convicted of prostitution-related offenses. Often, victims are desperate to be released, and in some cases, reunited with their children upon arrest and/or during trial. These factors—combined with poor legal counsel, particularly about the immigration consequences of criminal pleas and convictions—have in the past and will likely continue to lead to the deportation of wrongly accused victims who may have pled to or been unfairly convicted of domestic violence charges.³

For these reasons, we urge you to affirm the intent and spirit of VAWA and oppose ***S.2146*** and other similar legislative proposals that may be introduced. Thank you very much for taking this important step to protect and support immigrant survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual assault.

For more information, please contact Grace Huang, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence at grace@wscadv.org, (206) 389-2515 x 209, or Andrea Carcamo, National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza, at acarcamo@casadeesperanza.org, (703) 942-5582.

Sincerely,

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

² A study conducted by the University of Illinois- Chicago found that increased involvement of local police and immigration enforcement eroded trust between the police and immigrants, undocumented and documented. 45% of documented immigrants were less likely to report a crime while 70% of undocumented immigrants responded similarly. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/sanctuary-cities-public-safety-kate-steinle-san-francisco>

³ http://www.nationallatinonetwork.org/images/files/Quote_Sheet_for_Hill_Visits_-_Service_Providers.pdf