

Advocates for survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault urge Congress to act on Immigration Reform.

Despite current protections, there are many obstacles to immigrant survivors seeking safety and justice and current policies often drive victims further into the shadows.

We urge members of Congress to act on immigration reform in order to:

- Reduce the vulnerability to abuse and exploitation of millions of immigrant women in their homes and workplaces; and
- Enhance protections for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

1. What's at stake?

Abusive partners, human traffickers, or other abusers often exploit a victim's lack of immigration status, or dependent immigration status, as a way to maintain power and control and to keep victims silent. Indeed, many immigrant women experience an increased risk of:

Violence in the Home

- Immigrant victims are frequently threatened with deportation by their abusers, increasing their reluctance to seek help from the authorities or services.

Losing their Children

- Undocumented individuals face an ongoing threat of deportation and for many with U.S. citizen children, this could mean separation from their children, who would likely be forced to live in foster care or with an abuser.

Exploitation in the Workplace

- This is a reality for many undocumented individuals, who often face poor working conditions, sexual abuse, harassment, and wage theft because they cannot obtain work authorization. In its worst form, individuals are forced into commercial sex or forced labor.

2. Policy Recommendations:

- **Strengthen existing protections for immigrant survivors of violence.** The U visa is an important protection for immigrant victims of designated crimes, and a powerful tool for law enforcement to promote public safety by encouraging immigrant victims to come forward, report crimes, and cooperate with law enforcement in investigations and prosecutions. However, the current cap of 10,000 U visas a year is inadequate and was reached very early in the fiscal year.

Congress should strengthen the U visa program by increasing the number of U visas annually available, from the current 10,000 annual cap to at least 18,000.

Congress should include child abuse and elder abuse as U visa qualifying crimes to protect these already vulnerable populations from abuse, and to promote reporting and prosecutions.

- **Support survivor self-sufficiency and remove vulnerabilities to further victimization.** 75% of undocumented people are women and children. Providing a pathway to legal status and work authorization will reduce vulnerabilities and enhance self sufficiency for approximately 4 million undocumented women in the U.S. Congress should also improve and protect survivors' access to critical safety-net benefits. This will help them avoid the choice of remaining with their abusers or becoming homeless, and enable them to pursue a better path to safety and stability.
- **Safeguard abused dependent spouses and children.** Abused immigrants who rely on an abusive spouse or parent for their own legal status (including those in any legalization program) should be able to independently petition for legal status rather than have to choose between deportation and continued abuse.
- Ensure that communities that support survivors of violence, such as churches and shelters, **should not be criminally penalized for or discouraged from** being good Samaritans who help feed, house, and protect vulnerable undocumented immigrants.
- **Encourage immigrant survivors of violence to come forward without fear of retaliation.** Increased entanglement between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement weakens proven community policing efforts by undermining the trust and cooperation with immigrant communities, diverting scarce resources, detracting local police from the core mission to create safe communities, and silencing victims from coming forward to seek help.
- **Prevent human trafficking through better regulation of foreign labor recruiters.**

3. Immigration Reform Cannot Wait

- There is Bi-partisan Support for Immigration Reform in both the Senate and House
- The current immigration system is critically broken
- Numerous polls show that a significant majority of the American public supports Immigration reform.
- Studies show that immigration reform will have significant economic benefits for the nation.
- It will also enhance the safety and well-being of immigrant survivors and reduce vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation for millions of undocumented women and children.

For more information, please contact:

- Grace Huang, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 206-389- 2515 x 209, grace@wscadv.org
- Rosie Hidalgo, Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network, 703- 942-5582, rhidalgo@casadeesperanza.org
- Royce Bernstein Murray, National Immigrant Justice Center, 312-718-5021, rmurray@heartlandalliance.org