Dear Chairman Durbin and Chairman Peters:

On behalf of the 105 undersigned organizations that directly or through their membership assist and advocate on behalf of immigrant survivors of gender-based violence, we urge you to support enhanced protections for immigrant survivors of gender-based violence in this next reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

With VAWA’s enactment in 1994, a bipartisan majority in Congress created life-saving protections for immigrant survivors who are experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. The goal of this landmark legislation was “to remove immigration laws as a barrier that kept battered immigrant women and children locked in abusive relationships.”\(^1\) Congress recognized that abusive partners, rapists, traffickers, and other abusers often manipulate the immigration system to maintain power and control and to keep victims silent.

In all subsequent bipartisan reauthorizations of VAWA, Congress continued to support and improve protections for immigrant survivors, as it recognized there are several groups of battered immigrants “who did not have access to the immigration protections of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 which means that their abusers are virtually immune from prosecution because their victims can be deported as a result of action by their abusers and [immigration authorities] cannot offer them protection no matter how compelling their case under existing law.”\(^2\)

For over 25 years, VAWA has served as a rare example of how a bipartisan Congress can protect survivors and strengthen their ability to overcome abuse. Now, as the Senate considers its next actions on VAWA, it must continue the tradition of safeguarding protections for all survivors, including immigrant survivors of abuse.

The time to strengthen these protections is right now, and VAWA is the right vehicle to do it. For the last several years, survivors have faced increased barriers accessing relief designed for their protection. Changes in immigration priorities during the last administration have sharpened the tools of abusers and resulted in increased risks of harm to survivors. Unfortunately, abusers’ threats that victims will be deported and separated from their children have been actualized. Victims have been arrested at courthouses;\(^3\) abusers have manipulated the legal system

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3 See e.g. Michael Gordon. “Mother and her son turned up for a domestic-violence case. Then ICE arrested them” Charlotte Observer (July 20, 2018), available at: http://bit.ly/2SXzmfw
against survivors; survivors have been deported before their applications for relief have been decided; and immigrant survivors around the country are afraid to reach out for help to address domestic violence and sexual assault due to fears of deportation.

These barriers are exacerbated by substantial delays in processing for humanitarian-based applications like VAWA self-petitions, U and T visas, which create increased instability and risk of danger for survivors. For these reasons, it is critical that Congress reinforce the intent of protecting all victims and safeguarding and strengthening the immigration protections in VAWA. We call on Congress to:

➢ Ensure that survivors are not deported before their applications are adjudicated as this clearly undermines the bipartisan purpose that survivors have the ability to seek protection against deportation;

➢ Raise the U visa cap so that more survivors have access to these critical protections, an effort that was supported by President Biden given its inclusion in the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021;

➢ Add hate crimes and other qualifying crimes to the U visa statute to ensure that those who are victims of racist violence may seek paths to safety and justice;

➢ Strengthen confidentiality in protections for survivors who apply for VAWA self petitions, U visa and T visa applications by limiting information sharing about their applications.

➢ Ensure access to work authorization for survivors given the egregious delays in the processing of VAWA self-petitions, U visa and T visa applications. These significant delays, coupled with other barriers, such as a lack of access to financial supports, can subject survivors to additional risks.

➢ Provide access to basic economic and housing supports for immigrant survivors in order to escape and overcome abuse & exploitation.

We urge Congress, in accordance with its long-standing commitment to provide protections for all victims, to continue to protect victims in immigrant communities, safeguard the immigration provisions currently contained in VAWA, and oppose any rollbacks that would undermine protections and safety for immigrant survivors so that the protections of VAWA continue to be available to all survivors.

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4 See e.g Matthew Haag. Texas Deputy Accused of Molesting 4-Year-Old and Threatening to Deport Her Mother (June 18 2018).


7 Processing times for U visa applications are at 59-59.5 months (time from initial filing to waitlist determination); adjudication of VAWA self-petitions are taking 19.5-25 months, and adjudication of T visa applications are taking 17 to 29 months. See USCIS. “Check Case Processing Times” available at https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/
National Organizations (35)

Alianza Americas
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
ASISTA
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (Cast)
DeafHope
FAIR Girls
Freedom Network USA
Futures Without Violence
GABRIELA DC
Global Rights for Women
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Hispanic Federation
Immigration Center for Women and Children
International League of Advocates
Justice for Migrant Women
Kids in Need of Defense
National Council of Jewish Women
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
NIWAP, Inc. (National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project)
Oxfam America
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Refugees International
Tahirih Justice Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Voto Latino
World Relief

State and Local Organizations (70)

Alaska
Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (ANDVSA)

Arizona
Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

California
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Colin Immigration Law
Immigration Institute of the Bay Area
Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice
Maitri
Southwestern Law School Immigration Clinic
Stopping Domestic Violence

Colorado
Rise Above Violence
San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center

Connecticut
Apostle Immigrant Services

District of Columbia
Ayuda

Florida
Florida Council Against Sexual Violence
Americans for Immigrant Justice
MIRA USA
Oak Grove Church of God

Georgia
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault
Sur Legal Collaborative

Illinois
Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Law Office of Carol A Waldman
Legal Action Chicago
Mujeres Latinas en Accion

**Iowa**
**Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

**Kansas**
**Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence**

**Kentucky**
**Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence**
Cumberland Valley Domestic Violence Services
D.O.V.E.S. of Gateway, Inc. (DOMestic Violence Emergency Services)
GreenHouse17, INC.
Merrymon House Domestic Crisis Center
Safe Harbor of NE KY
SpringHaven, Inc.

**Maryland**
**Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence**
The Women's Law Center of Maryland

**Massachusetts**
**Jane Doe, Inc.**
Central West Justice Center

**Minnesota**
**Violence Free Minnesota**
Immigration Law Center of Minnesota
Roberts Immigration Law office, Ltd.

**Nebraska**
**Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence**

**New Jersey**
Legal Services of New Jersey
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

**New Mexico**
New Mexico Immigrant Law Center
New York

Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc.
Her Justice
New York Immigration Coalition
Safe Horizon
Sanctuary for Families
The Legal Aid Society (New York)
The Legal Project
Urban Justice Center Domestic Violence Project
Violence Intervention Program

Ohio

Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Advocating Opportunity
Crime Victim Services

Oregon

Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence (CARDV)
Impact NW
Meadowlark Immigration PC

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Progreso Latino

Texas

Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV)
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas

Virginia

Action Alliance
Just Neighbors Ministry

Washington

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP)
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project