

May 4, 2012

U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Member of Congress:

As a diverse coalition of immigration, faith, labor, human rights and community organizations serving and advocating on behalf of immigrant victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking we write to express our grave concerns and opposition to H.R. 4970, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012 (VAWA) (H.R. 4970, Adams, R-FL), as introduced, as it severely undermines protections available to vulnerable immigrant victims of violence and places victims at further risk of harm.

Enacted in 1994 and reauthorized twice in 2000 and 2005, VAWA has a long history of uniting lawmakers with the common purpose of protecting survivors of domestic violence. When VAWA was first conceived, Congress recognized that the noncitizen status of battered immigrants can make them particularly vulnerable to crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The abusers of undocumented immigrants often exploit the victims' immigration status, leaving the victim afraid to seek services or report the abuse to law enforcement and making them fearful of assisting with the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Congress sought to address this through the enactment of provisions in VAWA that enhance safety for victims and their children and provide an important tool for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes.

H.R. 4970 not only leaves out important improvements to VAWA's protections for immigrant survivors that were included in S. 1925, the widely supported bipartisan Senate bill, but it also seeks amendments that dramatically undercut existing protections for immigrant survivors in VAWA.

The changes proposed in H.R. 4970 to VAWA's current protections for immigrant survivors create obstacles for immigrant victims seeking to report crimes, increase the danger to immigrant victims by eliminating important confidentiality protections, undermine current anti-fraud protections, and roll back years of progress and commitment on the part of Congress to protect vulnerable immigrant victims.

On Tuesday, when H.R. 4970 is marked up in the Judiciary Committee, we urge you to ensure VAWA is kept free of all other unrelated immigration measures. VAWA should not be used as a vehicle to pass immigration policy measures that are not germane to VAWA's purpose. VAWA, including the immigration provisions, has always been focused on protecting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and trafficking; this should not change.

Each year the lives of hundreds of women, children, and others who fall victim to domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking are made safer by important programs the law created. On their behalf and on behalf of all others who will depend upon VAWA in years to come, we ask for your vigilance in preserving VAWA's central purpose.

Because of the serious concerns outlined above, we call on all members of Congress to oppose H.R. 4970.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mony Ruiz-Velasco, National Immigrant Justice Center at 312.660.1360 or via email at mruizvelasco@heartlandalliance.org or Grace Huang, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence at 206.389.2515 or via email at grace@wscadv.org.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.
Advocates for Human Rights
African Services Committee
Alachua County Victim Services and Rape Crisis Center
American Federation of Labor
American Immigration Lawyers Association
Americans for Immigrant Justice
America's Voice Education Fund
Artemis Justice Center
ASHA for Women
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Boston University Civil Litigation Program
Break the Cycle
Campaign for Community Change
Canal Alliance
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Casa Esperanza
Central American Resource Center
Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Community Action and Human Services Department
Community Immigration Law Center
Connecticut Legal Services Inc.
Domestic Violence in the African American Community
DREAM Activist Virginia
Education Not Deportation Project of the United We Dream Network
El Rescate Legal Services, Inc.
Empire Justice Center
Enlace Comunitario
FaithAction International House
Families for Freedom
Florida Coastal Immigrant Rights Clinic
Fuerza Latina
Futures Without Violence
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas

Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Defense Project
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Immigration Equality
inMotion, Inc.
InterCultural Advocacy Institute
International Institute of the Bay Area
Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Clinic University of Florida, Levin College of Law
Just Neighbors
Justice For Our Neighbors-Southeastern Michigan
Latin American Coalition
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association, Inc.
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women
Mountain Crisis Services
Nassau County Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Employment Law Project
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization for Women Foundation
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and the Women of Color Network.
New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC
NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project
Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center
Political Asylum Immigration Representation Project
Public Justice Center
Rainbow Services, Ltd.
Refugio del Rio Grande

Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Rural Women's Health Project
Service Employees International Union
South Asian Americans Leading Together
Tahirih Justice Center
Tapestri Inc
The Bridge to Hope
The Immigrant Legal Resource Center
The Kansas/Missouri Dream Alliance
TN Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence
UC Davis Immigration Law Clinic
United Migrant Opportunity Services
VIDA Legal Assistance, Inc.
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance
Voces Unidas for Justice
Voices of Men
Washington Immigration Defense Group
Washington State Coalition Against
Women's Refugee Commission
Worker Justice Center of New York