



Domestic Violence Advocates Cheer Senate Passage of Immigration Reform Bill

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[Washington, DC] – Today the National Network to End Domestic Violence celebrates Senate passage of Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation, S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, which will make our country safer for victims of domestic violence.

“Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable to abuse in their homes when they lack current legal immigration status,” said Kim Gandy, President and CEO of NNEADV. “Abusers exploit this vulnerability to maintain power and control and to keep victims silent. This bill helps victims come out of the shadows and is badly needed to keep victims safe and provide stability.”

The Senate bill enhances victim safety by increasing the number of visas available each year for immigrant victims who assist in the investigation or prosecution of designated crimes, including domestic violence (U visas), and broadens the eligibility for those visas to additional crime victims, including victims of child and elder abuse.

“Currently there are just too few of these special visas to allow immigrant victims of domestic violence to flee their perpetrators. This bill recognizes the great need for these lifesaving visas and will go a long way toward increasing safety and justice in our communities,” said Gandy.

The bill would also allow victims to maintain their own work authorization independent of an abusive spouse, would shorten the wait period for work authorization, and clarifies immigrant victims’ eligibility for housing assistance, all provisions that will increase victims’ ability to achieve long-term economic independence apart from the abuser.

“Once victims are free from abuse, their battle is only half over,” said Gandy. “They need to be able to find jobs and housing so that they can remain independent and safe with their children.”

“NNEDV’s member state domestic violence coalition leaders were in Washington, DC this month to discuss the needs of immigrant victims with their Congressional delegations,” said Gandy. “Today we celebrate this step and look forward to working with the U.S. House of Representatives to pass a similar bill that meets the needs of victims of violence.”

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