



October 10, 2017

## **Statement of the National Taskforce to End Sexual and Domestic Violence in Opposition to the Administration's October 2017 Immigration Blueprint**

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF)\* opposes the Trump Administration's immigration priorities for Congress, as announced on October 8, 2017. Already, Administration policy changes have left immigrant survivors of sexual and domestic violence more vulnerable to threats from abusers and more fearful that they will be deported at any moment and separated from their children and communities. Studies show that they are now less likely to call the police for help or go to court to protect themselves and their children from abuse and violence. In this climate, the NTF calls on our nation's policymakers to work together to uphold their commitment to all survivors – including through the protections of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) – and forge a bipartisan, humane national immigration policy.

The Administration's list of requests to Congress would roll back hard-won protections for women and children who have experienced violence both in the United States and abroad. Congress, through bipartisan action, has seen fit to offer pathways to immigration status as a means of protecting these survivors from further harm. The Administration now asks Congress to undo decades of progress toward humane policies that recognize the unique vulnerabilities of women and children who have experienced the trauma of violence and require immigration status to access safety.

Some of the Administration's requests include:

- Funding a southern border wall, which has been shown to be costly and unhelpful, while likely keeping out women and children fleeing high levels of violence who need and qualify for protection;
- Expanding the inefficient and inhumane expedited removal system to fast-track deportations of even more individuals seeking protection, including children fleeing sexual violence and even death, without a meaningful court hearing;

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\* The NTF is comprised of national, state, tribal, territorial and local leadership organizations and advocates working to end domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

- Increasing barriers to survivors seeking asylum and fleeing for their lives, even though the standards for asylum and refugee processing are already exceedingly high;
- Penalizing communities that enact community trust policies and adhere to Constitutional principles by coercing increased entanglement between federal immigration enforcement and local law enforcement, thus making it even less likely that immigrant victims and witnesses will reach out to law enforcement and further undermining public safety;
- Undoing a previous settlement agreement entered into by the government in a federal court case that limited the jailing of immigrant children since it was found to be detrimental to their health and well-being; and
- Increasing barriers to legal immigration status for large numbers of applicants, which will unfairly hurt immigrant families and harm America's economy.

The requests incorrectly describe protections for women and children as exploited “loopholes” instead of attempts by Congress to ensure the safety of those who need it most. A recent survey of more than 700 advocates and attorneys revealed that immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault are often afraid to come forward and access help.<sup>1</sup> Immigrant victims are expressing heightened fears and concerns about immigration enforcement, with 78% of advocates and attorneys reporting that victims are describing fear of contacting the police; 75% reporting that victims are afraid of going to court; and 43% reporting that immigrant victims are choosing not to move forward with criminal charges or obtaining protective orders.<sup>2</sup> No legislator willingly works against supporting victims of violence or preventing and ending domestic and sexual assault. We urge Congress to work to craft immigration relief that prevents future abuse and exploitation, promotes public trust, and makes communities safer.

Congress should reject the White House's October 2017 immigration principles, and work in a bipartisan manner towards the larger legislative reform of our nation's immigration laws that is desperately needed to provide a just, common sense, and humane solution to the current crisis. As part of these efforts, Congress must protect and defend DACA recipients who were brought to this country as children and who are now living, working, and raising families in the United States. They should not be used as a bargaining chip to impose immigration policies that undermine protections for other groups of immigrants.

Advocates for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence have reported that DACA and other forms of immigration relief are critical to protecting our communities and helping survivors feel secure and stable so that they can rebuild

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors”, available at <http://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-Advocate-and-Legal-Service-Survey-Key-Findings.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, 2017 advocate survey, found at: <http://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-Advocate-and-Legal-Service-Survey-Key-Findings.pdf>. See also, New Immigration Crackdowns Creating 'Chilling Effect' On Crime Reporting <http://www.npr.org/2017/05/25/529513771/new-immigration-crackdowns-creating-chilling-effect-on-crime-reporting>

their lives and be economically self-sufficient.<sup>3</sup> Safeguarding DACA and other immigration relief will protect individuals from deportation and allow survivors and witnesses of crimes like domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking to feel safe to report crimes to police without fear that seeking justice will put them at risk of being deported.

The NTF urges Congress to pass the Dream Act of 2017, granting legal status to young people who arrived in the United States before they turned 18, helping protect them from abuse and exploitation, and allowing them the opportunity to live and work in the United States permanently. Congress should reject the White House's proposals that would roll back decades of work to establish protections for survivors of violence. And it must continue to work in a bipartisan manner to seek a more just and humane immigration system that protects survivors and strengthens families, communities, and the nation.

For more information, please contact Grace Huang, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence at [ghuang@api-gbv.org](mailto:ghuang@api-gbv.org), Archi Pyati, Tahirih Justice Center, at [archip@tahirih.org](mailto:archip@tahirih.org), or Rosie Hidalgo, National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza, at [rhidalgo@casadeesperanza.org](mailto:rhidalgo@casadeesperanza.org).

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<sup>3</sup> National Latin@ Network Casa de Esperanza, "Testimonies From the Field: Benefits of DACA for Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence," available at [https://nationallatinonetwork.org/images/files/Quote\\_Sheet\\_for\\_Hill\\_Visits\\_2.pdf](https://nationallatinonetwork.org/images/files/Quote_Sheet_for_Hill_Visits_2.pdf)