

**Statement of the Tahirih Justice Center:
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY**

**HEARING:
“The Effect of Sanctuary City Policies on the Ability to Combat the
Opioid Epidemic”
February 15, 2018**

The Tahirih Justice Center (“Tahirih”) respectfully submits this statement to the United States House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, as it considers “The Effect of Sanctuary City Policies on the Ability to Combat the Opioid Epidemic.”

Tahirih is a national nonpartisan organization that has assisted over 20,000 immigrant survivors of gender-based violence over the past 20 years. Our clients include women and girls who have endured horrific abuses such as rape, domestic violence, and human trafficking and are in dire need of humanitarian relief.

The hallmark of so-called “Sanctuary City” policies is the preservation of community trust. Contrary to common misperceptions regarding such policies, they *do not* provide a safe haven for criminals, or immunize individuals from immigration enforcement. Rather, by keeping immigration enforcement in the hands of the Department of Homeland Security, such policies ensure that all survivors of crime feel safe calling 911 and ultimately serving as key witnesses in criminal cases. Pinellas County, FL Sheriff Bob Gualtieri noted last fall that “If [immigrants] think that local law enforcement is going to arrest them and put them in jail every time we have contact with them, *it’s about impossible for us to effectively do our job.*”ⁱ

It is well-documented that commingling federal immigration enforcement with local law enforcement erodes immigrants’ trust of police.ⁱⁱ According to a January 2018 report published by Tahirih, victims are now too afraid to call 911 because they do not believe that the police are there to help them: “The fear is undermining access to safety and justice, and increasing vulnerability to exploitation [by abusers]...[t]he overall chilling effect on women is woven throughout many aspects of their lives —some are even afraid to seek health insurance for U.S. Citizen children or enroll them in school.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In the context of domestic violence and human trafficking, perpetrators deliberately manipulate and isolate victims to limit their access to information about their legal rights. Both the longstanding Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Trafficking Victims

Protection Act (TVPA) were enacted with bipartisan support precisely to encourage immigrant survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and other crimes to come forward and assist law enforcement. Immigration enforcement by local police, however, directly thwarts Congressional intent in passing these critical laws. When immigrants know they can call the police without fear of deportation, it is perpetrators of all types of crimes – and not victims or their children – that are deterred and punished. Following passage of a state law last year entangling federal and local immigration enforcement, a client aptly remarked, “*This is exactly what [my abuser] has been waiting for.*” Despite longstanding protections under VAWA, even victims who *hold lawful immigration status* succumb to intimidation particularly in a heightened climate of fear. For some, the risk of deportation also means sentencing a US citizen child to the custody of a violent abuser.

It is becoming increasingly clear that *we are all less safe* when we deter victims from calling 911 and embolden perpetrators to abuse victims with impunity. Tahirih assists women whose abusers have committed various unrelated crimes and pose a significant danger to others. One client was severely abused by a US Citizen who was also engaged in sex trafficking of young girls. She reported him to police, and went on to serve as a key witness and even wore a wire to help federal prosecutors secure a conviction. He is currently serving a prison sentence. Another client’s abusive husband, also a US Citizen, faced criminal charges for grand larceny, DWI, burglary, and assault on a police officer.

Researchers are also taking note of the overlap between mass shootings and domestic violence: “[W]hat perpetrators of terrorist attacks turn out to often have in common...are histories of domestic violence...an alarming number of those who have been accused of domestic abuse pose serious and often lethal threats, not just to their intimate partners but to society at large.”^{iv} Another researcher has documented how a striking number of those responsible for killing law enforcement officers have a history of domestic violence.^v As a result, some advocate viewing domestic violence as a potential “national security risk.”^{vi} Recognizing the link between domestic violence and overall public safety presents a critical opportunity to prevent crime that afflicts all members of our communities. As explained above, survivors of domestic violence have firsthand, eyewitness information that can help police get violent criminals off the streets before they inflict grave, and potentially large scale damage on others as well.

In light of the above, we urge you carefully consider our perspective as you evaluate the impact of “Sanctuary” policies on the ability of law enforcement to combat the opioid epidemic. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement to the Subcommittee.



Archi Pyati
Chief of Policy
archip@tahirih.org

<https://thinkprogress.org/immigrants-jailed-past-release-date-cbb668d4d3d9/>.

ⁱⁱ See http://www.usccr.gov/press/2017/Statement_04-24-2017-Immigrant-Access-Justice.pdf; <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/30/us/immigrants-deportation-sexual-abuse.html>; <http://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-Advocate-and-Legal-Service-Survey-Key-Findings.pdf>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/12/immigration-debate-might-be-having-a-chilling-effect-on-crime-reporting-in-hispanic-communities-police-say/?utm_term=.7ffb66e3c8c2.

ⁱⁱⁱTahirih Justice Center, *Nationwide Survey: A Window into the Challenges Immigrant Women and Girls Face in the United States and the Policy Solutions to Address Them* at 8 (Jan. 31, 2018), <http://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Tahirih-Justice-Center-Survey-Report-1.31.18-1.pdf>.

^{iv} See <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-link-between-domestic-violence-and-mass-shootings-james-hodgkinson-steve-scalise>; <https://www.thecut.com/2016/07/mass-killers-terrorism-domestic-violence.html>; https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/16/world/americas/control-and-fear-what-mass-killings-and-domestic-violence-have-in-common.html?_r=0; <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/10/opinions/texas-shooting-relationship-violence-stoever-opinion/index.html>; <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-11-16/how-gun-laws-let-domestic-violence-offenders-slip-through-cracks>; <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/11/15/rancho-tehama-why-do-mass-shooters-target-children-strangers/869306001/>; <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-unveils-first-proposal-2018-state-state-remove-firearms-domestic-abusers>; http://www.niagara-gazette.com/news/local_news/taking-aim-at-guns-and-domestic-violence/article_cde98b14-e3d5-5341-963e-cdb42da6c094.html.

^v*Men Who Strangle Women Also Kill Cops*, Domestic Violence Report, Vol. 19, No. 6, August/September 2014, p. 85.

^{vi} <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-letters-domestic-violence-elevated-to-national-security-threat-20171110-story.html>.