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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS MAY AGAIN ENDURE A “CHILLING EFFECT” THAT DETERS ACCESS TO LIFE-SAVING SERVICES DURING HURRICANE FLORENCE

According to [Vice News](#) and other sources, US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) and US Customs & Border Protection (CBP) confirmed on Wednesday that they will not conduct immigration enforcement activities in regions impacted by Hurricane Florence, except where there is a serious threat to public safety. The agencies, both within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), further noted that their “highest priority remains the preservation of life and safety.”

As Vice News reports, however, DHS apparently did not follow its identical policy last year, when Hurricane Irma devastated areas in Florida. Furthermore, Tahirih and others assisting immigrants at the primary shelter in Houston, Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey observed that DHS maintained a visible presence both outside and inside the shelter. Advocates even noted DHS agents stationed directly across the aisle from the immigration help desk at one point. While it was not clear what duties the agents were carrying out, it was apparent that, as expected, their presence was deterring immigrants from seeking potentially life-saving assistance.

“Tahirih’s clients consist of survivors of severe domestic violence who are routinely manipulated by abusers into believing that they will be deported if they try to access emergency government services. In light of DHS’ actions last year, Tahirih remains deeply concerned that survivors will again endure a ‘chilling effect’ that deters them from accessing services they desperately need as a result of emergencies such as Hurricane Florence. Survivors must instead be able to fully take the government at its word that it will put the life and safety of *all*, regardless of immigration status, above all else,” said Irena Sullivan, Senior Immigration Policy Counsel.

About the Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center is the largest national direct service and policy advocacy organization focused on assisting immigrant women and girls fleeing violence. Tahirih will continue to monitor policy shifts that impact women and girls fleeing violence and advocate for the United States to honor its legal obligations to protect those fleeing human rights abuses.

Tahirih Justice Center is a national non-profit that protects courageous immigrant women and girls who refuse to be victims of violence through free legal and social services, public policy advocacy, and training and education. Visit www.tahirih.org for more information.