



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | June 4, 2019

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ADVOCATES RELEASE NATIONWIDE SURVEY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTING BY IMMIGRANTS

Majority of advocates, attorneys report immigrant survivors are fearful of police

On June 4, 2019, seven national organizations – Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (APIGBV), ASISTA, Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV), National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH), National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), and the Tahirih Justice Center – released the results of a nationwide survey of advocates and attorneys on the fears and concerns of immigrant survivors in reporting domestic violence and sexual assault.

“This survey shows us the grave chilling effect that recent immigration policy changes are having on immigrant survivors of violence,” said Archi Pyati, Chief of Policy for the Tahirih Justice Center. “This is the message they are receiving: either stay with your abuser or risk deportation.”

A total of 575 victim advocates and attorneys in 42 states, one U.S. territory, and the District of Columbia completed the survey and reported how changing immigration policies affect the concerns of service providers and the fears of immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The survey findings showed that 59 percent of respondents observed an increase in the number of immigration-related questions that their agencies were receiving from immigrant survivors.

“Survivors of domestic and sexual violence already face difficult challenges in escaping and overcoming abuse. The current environment creates even higher barriers in getting help, and emboldens abusers to continue to act without repercussions,” said Grace Huang, Policy Director at the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence.

The survey revealed that 52% of advocates have worked with immigrant survivors who decided to drop civil or criminal cases because they were fearful to continue with their cases. This demonstrates an increase compared to a previous survey conducted in 2017. Additionally, three out of four service providers responding to the survey reported that immigrant survivors had concerns about going to court for a matter related to the abuser/offender. Finally, 76 percent of advocates reported that immigrant survivors have shared concerns about contacting police.

“If immigrants are too afraid to call the police or go to court because of fear of deportation, they become more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation,” said Rosie Hidalgo, Senior Director of Public Policy for Casa de Esperanza: National Latina Network. “This undermines victim safety as



well as public safety and is contrary to our nation’s commitment to affording protections for all survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.”

Current immigration policies, including increased entanglement of local and state law enforcement with federal immigration enforcement efforts, tightened eligibility for legal protections, a narrowed pathway to asylum, and expanded deportation priorities have had a significant impact on the climate of fear affecting immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and has undermined their access to safety and justice.

“While deeply unsettling, it comes as no surprise that a huge majority (76%) of immigrant survivors are hesitant to reach out to the police for assistance,” said Qudsia Raja, Policy Director, National Domestic Violence Hotline. “This trend is consistent with what advocates at The Hotline have been hearing on the lines over the past several years. We have serious concerns that reasonable fears of detention, deportation, or family separation is causing immigrant survivors to stay in increasingly dangerous relationships.”

Congress created important protections for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in the express recognition that perpetrators often exploit a victim’s lack of immigration status as a tactic of abuse. The U and T visa program in VAWA was created to “strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, and prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking... and other crimes created against aliens, while offering protection to victims of such offenses in keeping with the humanitarian interests of the United States.”

“Established federal law has been lifesaving for survivors of violence. It is vital that these protections remain available to ensure that survivors can flee and rebuild their lives,” said Monica McLaughlin, Director of Public Policy at the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

“Abusers often use the threat of deportation against immigrant survivors as a means to maintain power and control. When survivors fear that reaching out to services and institutions like the courts will lead to their deportation or separation from their families, this weakens public safety and existing laws designed for their protection, while at the same time strengthens the threats of abusers and perpetrators of crime.” said Cecelia Friedman Levin, Senior Policy Council at ASISTA.

“If we are serious about addressing the epidemic of sexual violence in our country, we must create safe avenues for immigrant survivors to come forward and receive help,” said Terri Poore, Policy Director at the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence. “It is deeply alarming that so many immigrant survivors suffer fear of deportation in addition to the trauma of sexual violence.”

Read the [Survey Key Findings report](#) to learn more about the results of the 2019 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors.



Partner agencies include:

The ***Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence*** is a national resource center on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The Institute serves a national network of advocates and community-based service programs that work with Asian and Pacific Islander and immigrant survivors, and is a leader on providing analysis and advocacy on critical issues facing victims in the Asian and Pacific Islander and immigrant communities. The Institute leads by promoting culturally relevant intervention and prevention, expert consultation, technical assistance and training; conducting and disseminating critical research; and informing public policy.

ASISTA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that provides national leadership, advocacy, training, and technical assistance to those working with crime survivors seeking secure immigration status, especially those who have suffered gender-based violence. To learn more about ASISTA, visit www.asistahelp.org.

Casa de Esperanza is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that seeks to mobilize Latinas and Latino communities to end domestic violence. Founded in 1982 in Minnesota to provide emergency shelter for women and children experiencing domestic violence, in 2009 Casa de Esperanza launched the National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities. The National Latin@ Network is a national institute focused on preventing and addressing domestic violence in Latino communities, providing national training and technical assistance, policy advocacy and research. To learn more about the organization, please visit casadeesperanza.org and nationallatinonetwork.org.

The ***National Alliance to End Sexual Violence*** (NAESV) is the voice in Washington for the 56 state and territorial sexual assault coalitions and 1300 rape crisis centers working to end sexual violence and support survivors. The local rape crisis centers in our network see every day the widespread and devastating impacts of sexual assault upon survivors and provide the frontline response in their communities advocating for victims, spreading awareness and prevention messages, and coordinating with others who respond to these crimes.

The ***National Domestic Violence Hotline*** is a non-profit organization established in 1996 as a component of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Operating around the clock, confidential and free of cost, The Hotline provides victims and survivors with life-saving tools and immediate support through its text, chat, and phone services. Contacts to The Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) can expect highly trained advocates to offer compassionate support, crisis intervention information and referral services in more than 200 languages. Visitors to TheHotline.org can chat live with advocates and they can find information about domestic violence, safety planning, local resources, and ways to support the organization.

The ***National Network to End Domestic Violence*** (NNEDV) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that serves as a leading national voice for domestic violence victims and their allies. NNEDV's membership includes all 56 state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence, including over 2,000 local programs. NNEDV has been advancing the movement against domestic violence over 25 years, having led efforts among domestic violence advocates and survivors in urging Congress to pass the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit NNEDV.org.

The ***Tahirih Justice Center*** is the only national, multi-city organization providing both policy advocacy and direct, on the ground holistic legal and social services to immigrant and refugee 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.