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The Reauthorization of VAWA Was Necessary & Contains Some Historic Gains Ultimately Falls Short for Immigrant Survivors of Violence

Washington, D.C. — Last night, the Senate reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a vote that was six years in the making. The Tahirih Justice Center applauds Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) for their legislative leadership in the fight to get VAWA over the finish line. The new authorization provides more than \$500 million to increase resources for survivors of violence.

Thanks to the advocacy of Tahirih and members of the **Forced Marriage Working Group**, forced marriage has been defined and recognized as a form of violence against women in the United States.

“Having forced marriage defined in VAWA for the first time represents a major milestone” said Casey Carter Swegman, Director of Public Policy at the Tahirih Justice Center. “For the survivors we serve this means being seen. It will go a long way in raising awareness about this all-too-common form of abuse across the movement to end violence against women. Domestic violence and sexual assault programs and service providers will no longer have to wonder if their funding ‘covers’ work with forced marriage survivors. This recognition is historic and long overdue.”

In addition, this VAWA reauthorization finally repeals the federal marriage defense to statutory rape and requires annual reporting on the disturbing disconnect between minimum marriage age and age of consent in state laws. These provisions represent a big win for the movement to end forced and child marriage in the U.S. and send a strong message to all states that maintain harmful statutes that it's time for change.

Unfortunately, while this authorization maintains preexisting protection for immigrant survivors, we are disappointed that Congress ignored our ask of increasing or eliminating the annual cap for U visas. The low annual cap of 10,000 U visas essentially burdens the backlog and fails to adapt to the needs of survivors of violence.

“It was high time that Congress reauthorize VAWA,” said Archi Pyati, CEO of the Tahirih Justice Center. “While we celebrate this hard-won moment, we can’t help but notice the missed opportunity to improve the legal protections available to immigrants. We will keep fighting so that ALL survivors can live in safety and free from violence.”

First passed in 1994, VAWA lays out legal protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. The original bill updated and reauthorized in 2000, 2005 and 2013.

For further comments on this topic, please email media@tahirih.org

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The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, nonprofit organization that serves immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. By amplifying the experiences of survivors in communities, courts, and Congress, Tahirih's mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and live in safety and with dignity.