

**Joint Statement for the Record**  
**U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement**  
**May 14, 2026**

"Fairfax County, Virginia: The Dangerous Consequences of Sanctuary Policies"

Dear Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Jayapal, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The undersigned advocates and experts who serve, uplift, and advocate for and on behalf of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other gender-based abuses respectfully request that this statement be entered into the record for the above-mentioned hearing. While this hearing focused on policies in Fairfax, Virginia our statement is based on our collective expertise regarding the impact of federal and state policies on survivors nationwide. We urge Congress to support community trust ordinances that protect immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. These so-called "sanctuary" policies enhance community safety by diminishing the risks that contact with law enforcement agencies (LEAs), hospitals, and social service providers will have disastrous immigration consequences for and will further endanger survivors and witnesses.

We want to acknowledge that this hearing was prompted by a horrific tragedy of the death of Stephanie Minter. We extend our deepest condolences to Ms. Cheryl Minter and the entire Minter family for their loss.

Many victims have been failed by the systems that purport to help them. When abuse survivors who reach out for help receive inadequate or harmful responses, this deepens their risk, causes immense distrust in the institutions designed to protect them, and disempowers victims who come forward.<sup>1</sup> It is our common mission to ensure that **all** victim-survivors have a path to safety and justice. They deserve nothing less.

In our work with immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence, we see that abusive partners, traffickers, landlords, and employers often use immigration status and the threat of deportation as a tool of power and control to keep survivors silent.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, there is deeply-held and justified fear of deportation that keeps immigrant survivors and their families from reporting abuse to law enforcement or service agencies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Victim Research. "What specific aspects of the criminal justice system have been shown to have an impact on survivors?" available at

<https://victimresearch.org/library/what-part-of-the-criminal-justice-process-has-the-most-impact-on-victims/>

<sup>2</sup> Moa Short. "My Husband Told the Sheriff to Report Me to ICE" *The Cut* (October 29, 2025), available at

<https://www.thecut.com/article/husband-reported-wife-ice-domestic-violence-deportation-threats.html>; Flores, Y.R., Raut, S., Mengo, C. *et al.* Service Accessibility: Service Providers' Perspectives on Barriers Faced by Immigrant Women of Color Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *J Fam Viol* (2025). available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00909-x>

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Ryan Yousefi "Man Accused of Sexually Battering Woman, Threatening ICE Deportation if she Called Police" (January 24, 2026), available at <https://parklandtalk.com/parkland-man-accused-sexually-battering-52244>

Increased collaboration between state and local authorities and immigration enforcement intensifies fear of deportation. As of May 14, 2026, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has signed 1,832 Memorandums of Agreement for 287(g) programs covering 39 states and two U.S. territories.<sup>4</sup> Of those, 1,151 (or just over 62%) represent "Task Force Models" in which state and local law enforcement may "identify and report suspected aliens not charged with crimes"<sup>5</sup> and permit officers to enforce immigration laws while performing routine police duties.<sup>6</sup> The Baldwin Sheriff's Office in Alabama employed this Task Force Model of 287(g) agreements when they arrested and detained Wendy Hernandez Reyes, a single mother who is herself a survivor of domestic violence with no criminal record, on her way to work. Under past ICE guidance, ICE was required to look for indicia that suggests a noncitizen is a victim of crime, such as being the beneficiary of an order of protection.<sup>7</sup> A person's status as a victim was to be taken into account in determining whether to take civil immigration enforcement action against an individual. However, this protective guidance is no longer in place.<sup>8</sup> In today's overbroad, indiscriminate and chaotic enforcement regime, no such factors were taken into account, causing Ms. Hernandez Reyes to be detained, deported and separated from her young son, Orlin Hernandez Reyes.<sup>9</sup> After losing his mother to deportation, Orlin was left in the care of an abusive family member and brutally murdered. His death is a tragic reminder that decisions and policy do not occur in a vacuum; they profoundly impact the safety and survival of families.

The experiences of Wendy Hernandez Reyes and the Minter family arise in different contexts and are framed as being on opposing sides of the 287(g) debate. Yet, at a fundamental level, both stories involve profound loss. No parent should have to suffer the loss of a child, and no mother should have their grief publicly amplified by systems that have failed them. Immigration enforcement policy must move beyond an overbroad, destructive policy and focus on the due process, dignity, and safety of families and communities.

What this overbroad immigration enforcement policy means practically is that survivors are not only vulnerable in their homes, but also fearful outside the home while walking a child to

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<sup>4</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act, available at <https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g> (last accessed May 15, 2025). See also See Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "287(g) Participating Agencies, available at

<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/about/offices/ero/287g/participatingAgencies05142026am.xlsx> (last accessed May 15, 2026)

<sup>5</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act, available at <https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g> (last accessed May 15, 2025)

<sup>6</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "287(g) Brochure" available at <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/about/offices/ero/287g/287gBrochure.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "ICE Directive 11005.3: Using a Victim-Centered Approach with Noncitizen Crime Victims" (August 10, 2021), available at <https://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/wp-content/uploads/ICE-Victim-Centered-Directive-11005.3.pdf>;

<sup>8</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Interim Guidance on Civil Immigration Enforcement Actions Involving Current or Potential Beneficiaries of Victim-Based Immigration Benefits" (January 2025), available at <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/policy/11005.4.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Maria Sacchetti. "She was deported without her toddler. Then ICE blamed her for his killing." Washington Post (May 16, 2026), available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/05/16/she-was-deported-without-her-toddler-then-ice-blamed-her-his-murder/?\\_pml=1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/05/16/she-was-deported-without-her-toddler-then-ice-blamed-her-his-murder/?_pml=1)

school,<sup>10</sup> going to court,<sup>11</sup> seeking medical care<sup>12</sup>, or attending services at their place of worship.<sup>13</sup> One advocate shared that a survivor was afraid to go to the hospital and report abuse to the police after she was assaulted. She had a broken nose and orbital bone.<sup>14</sup> Across the board, advocates and service providers report that victims were retreating into the shadows, not seeking help from the very services that are supposed to keep all of us safe.<sup>15</sup> For example, they noted:

- "There's a lot of fear and anxiety in the community. We had women, especially pregnant women, who were coming to our office asking us if it was safe to go to the doctor."
- "[T]he end result with greater [immigration] enforcement that we're seeing right now is [that] people within the community are afraid of ... reporting any kind of crime."

A recent poll found that 62% of Americans believe ICE's actions are making Americans less safe.<sup>16</sup> This concern has been echoed by law enforcement leaders who worry that overbroad immigration enforcement actions are harming public trust.<sup>17</sup> State and local officials are best positioned to determine the needs of their communities—not the federal government. Many jurisdictions maintain "sanctuary" policies to ensure they can leverage limited resources where they are needed most. Sanctuary policies do not prevent immigration enforcement, but rather place limits on certain types of cooperation with federal immigration authorities.<sup>18</sup> These limits recognize that local and state government agencies may have limited funding, resources, or training to take on duties that expand their role to federal immigration enforcement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Madeleine Ngo. "ICE Arrests Disrupt Schools, Prompting Fear Among Families" New York Times (December 17, 2025) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/17/us/politics/ice-arrests-schools.html>

<sup>11</sup> Marie-Rose Sheinerman. "She Testified About Being Raped. Then ICE Showed Up." The Atlantic (April 6, 2026), available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/2026/04/ice-deportation-domestic-violence-victims/686629/>

<sup>12</sup> KFF. "Key Facts on Health Coverage of Immigrants" (May 19, 2026), available at

<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/key-facts-on-health-coverage-of-immigrants/>

<sup>13</sup> Katelyn Vue. "Immigrant victims of domestic violence face new hurdles, Minnesota Advocates Say" Sahan Journal (April 17, 2025), available at: <https://sahanjournal.com/immigration/immigrant-domestic-violence-victims-hurdles/> ;

<https://abc7ny.com/post/ni-leaders-community-concerned-ice-agents-arrest-2-outside-church-union-city/18608621/>

<sup>14</sup> Alliance for Immigrant Survivors. Fear and Silence: 2025 Insights from Advocates for Immigrant Survivors, available at [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9f1d48da02bc44473c36f1/t/6851e1903a67be6191523f91/1750196624790/AIS\\_Insights-from-Advocates-for-Immigrant+Survivors.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9f1d48da02bc44473c36f1/t/6851e1903a67be6191523f91/1750196624790/AIS_Insights-from-Advocates-for-Immigrant+Survivors.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Quotes from interviews conducted by University of Miami School of Law's Human Rights Clinic with representatives from over 30 community-based organizations to understand the realities on the ground for domestic violence and sexual assault victims. For more information about the Human Rights Clinic's COURAGE Initiative, see

<https://www.law.miami.edu/academics/programs/human-rights/initiatives/courage/>

<sup>16</sup> PBS News. "Poll: Nearly two-thirds of Americans say ICE has gone too far in immigration Crackdown" (February 5, 2026), available at

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/poll-nearly-two-thirds-of-americans-say-ice-has-gone-too-far-in-immigration-crackdown>

<sup>17</sup> Shaila Dewan, 'It's All Just Going Down the Toilet': Police Chiefs Fume at ICE Tactics,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/30/us/its-all-just-going-down-the-toilet-police-chiefs-fume-at-ice-tactics.html>

<sup>18</sup> American Immigration Council. "Fact Sheet-Sanctuary Policies: An Overview" (February 21, 2025), available at

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/sanctuary-policies-overview>

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Tom Manger, Chief of Police, President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association on behalf of the Major Cities Chiefs Association and Montgomery County Police Department before the Senate Judiciary Committee" (July 21, 2015), available at <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/07-21-15%20Manger%20Testimony.pdf>

In our work with survivors, we know that sanctuary or community trust policies aren't obstacles to public safety, They are essential to it.<sup>20</sup>

More than 30 years ago, a bipartisan Congress enacted the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and then passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, which created critical pathways to safety and stability for immigrant survivors. These landmark bipartisan measures– like VAWA self-petitions, U and T visas– were designed to prevent abusers from using threats of deportation to control immigrant survivors and to encourage noncitizens to report crimes. Congress recognized that it was vital to ensure that abusers, traffickers, and perpetrators of crime could not weaponize the immigration system to silence victims and avoid accountability. As Congress wrote when it created U and T visas, the goal was to "strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, and prosecute" certain serious crimes "while offering protection to victims of such offenses and keeping with the humanitarian interests of the United States."<sup>21</sup>

Today, survivors with pending and even approved gender-based violence petitions are being detained and placed in adversarial removal proceedings where they have no right to free, court-appointed counsel. These safety remedies paradoxically now create new risks for survivors who are made more vulnerable to ICE enforcement. Contrary to the Congressional intent to make these protections available to survivors, a pending application for VAWA, U, or T status will not prevent ICE from detaining someone and placing them in adversarial removal proceedings. ICE has also detained survivors who reported for routine check-in appointments. Advocates report that U- and T visa petitioners are being detained during the application process and that a pending victim-based petition has no bearing on ICE's detention determination, in direct violation of prior clear policy aimed at protecting crime survivors and witnesses to ongoing criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Advocates at the local level are continuing to report the devastating effects of anti-immigrant laws and policies. For example, Americans for Immigrant Justice (AI Justice) in Miami, Florida reports that a U visa applicant with a bona fide determination and a valid work permit was detained by ICE along with his derivative son while they were traveling to work. Both were carrying their immigration documents at the time of detention. They were initially detained at a detention center in Miami and later transferred to another state. AI Justice represents multiple other clients with approved VAWA petitions or U visas based on serious abuse who were detained for months, some for no stated reason, one for lacking proof of vehicle registration, another for operating a scooter with an international driver's license, and others for driving without a license.

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<sup>20</sup> Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes & Monica Deza, Can Sanctuary Policies Reduce Domestic Violence? IZA Discussion Paper No. 12868 (Dec. 2019).

<sup>21</sup> See §1513(a)(2)(A), Public Law No: 106-386, 114 Stat. 1464. Congress found that "providing battered immigrant women and children . . . with protection against deportation . . . frees them to cooperate with law enforcement and prosecutors in criminal cases brought against their abusers."

USCIS backlogs of VAWA self-petitions and life-saving T and U visas compound the crisis, with U visas taking over a decade to grant and the average case-processing time for VAWA Self-Petition cases being 48.5 months as of May 2026. Overall, legal protections enacted during the past three decades are now less protective, and instead of invoking a sense of safety, the application process is fraught with anxiety, fear, and questions about whether to apply under the current circumstances. Congressional remedies intended to protect crime victims have become points of fear and even deportation.

To seriously address survivors' safety, we respectfully urge Congress to:

- 1) Prohibit funding from being used in enforcement actions at or near, **sensitive locations** including courthouses, domestic violence shelters, and medical facilities, which are the very places survivors of crime often seek help.
- 2) DHS must **reinstate the victim-centered approach**. Funding overbroad, unchecked enforcement actions has resulted in survivors and witnesses of crime being deported despite pending immigration relief based upon their victimhood in some cases, and before they can pursue immigration relief for which they are eligible in other cases. Congress should prohibit funding for enforcement actions against individuals with approved or pending survivor-based claims.
- 3) **Restore and Strengthen Protections for VAWA, U Visa, and T Visa Petitioners**. Congress must ensure that pending VAWA Self-Petitions and U and T visa petitions function as true protections from deportation, consistent with original Congressional intent. **ICE must be barred from removing survivors with pending applications and from detaining pending applicants.**
- 4) **Address Processing Backlogs**. Congress must fund adequate USCIS staffing and increase the annual cap on U and T visas to ensure survivors can access protection in a timely manner.
- 5) **Reject Section 287(g) agreements**. Leave immigration enforcement to the federal government and allow state and local police to focus on what their communities need to feel safe. This means limiting collaboration to only when it is required by law. The entanglement of local police with federal immigration enforcement has a documented chilling effect on survivors' willingness to report abuse, hampering local police from protecting communities. Communities must be able to trust local law enforcement without fear that a call for help will trigger deportation, as Congress intended.
- 6) Protect and preserve the ability of states and localities to maintain **sanctuary policies**, and oppose Executive Orders that withhold federal funding to coerce their elimination.

7) **Restore Access to Critical Safety Nets for Survivors.** H.R. 1 eliminated critical safety net benefits like SNAP, the Child Health Insurance Program, and Medicare for lawfully present individuals including immigrant survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking as well as refugees and asylees. Congress must act to restore these critical protections as they are key to helping end cycles of violence.

8) **Stop Funding to Harmful Rules.** Over the last year, DHS has proposed harmful rules, from transforming public charge considerations and the issuance of work permits to significant expansion of biometrics data gathering among others. Congress should ensure no funding supports the implementation of these harmful rules.

9) **Ensure Safe Access to Community Resources, Healthcare, and Courts.** Immigrants – including those with pending applications for legal status – must be able to safely access hospitals, domestic violence shelters, schools, community organizations, and state and federal courthouses. ICE enforcement operations at or near these locations must be prohibited.

10) Finally, Congress must ensure that critically needed **funding for the programs and organizations that serve and support crime victims** is delivered. Federal grants fund critical services and can save the lives of abuse victims; however, \$200 million is sitting unspent. Changes made by the White House are preventing the distribution of funds meant to help survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking, including 2026 grants that have not been delivered.

Respectfully submitted:

### **Organizational Signatories**

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Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

ASISTA Immigration Assistance

California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law

Esperanza United

Her Justice

Jane Doe Inc. (Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence)

Just Solutions

National Network To End Domestic Violence

Tahirih Justice Center

The Collaborative for Restoring Healing and Transforming Communities

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