

Memorandum in Support

Access to temporary assistance to needy families block grant program, safety net assistance,
and medical assistance for certain noncitizens
A.325 (Gonzalez-Rojas)/S.710 (Cleare)

Her Justice strongly supports A.325/S.710, which will provide vital financial and medical support to the most vulnerable members of our immigrant community. Her Justice is a nonprofit organization that advocates with and for women living in poverty in New York City by providing free legal services, in partnership with pro bono attorneys at New York City's law firms, in the areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Her Justice clients come from all over New York City – 31% live in Queens, 29% in Brooklyn, 23% in the Bronx, 13% in Manhattan and 2% in Staten Island. They also represent New York City: 54% are Latina, 24% are Black, 9% are Asian, 8% are White and 5% are Native American or from another minority group. All our clients are in critical need of legal support; 83% are survivors of intimate partner violence; 70% are mothers; 70% were born outside of the U.S.; and 48% need an interpreter in court.

Her Justice's immigration legal services practice focuses on serving immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence through applications available under the federal Violence Against Women Act. Even in the best of times, the cards are stacked against our clients. But the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on our clients and other immigrants in New York, causing continued instability for them and their families. Many immigrants worked on the frontlines during the pandemic, suffering deeply the challenge of juggling work and childcare and keeping family safe. Families' hard-won financial stability became shakier. And all the while, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continued to raise barriers to our clients' ability to stabilize their lives and work legally in this country. With increased enforcement and threatened regulatory changes in the current moment, undocumented immigrants are more fearful than ever to engage with systems for the help they desperately needed.

A.325/S.710 will extend benefits and assistance to those eligible to submit humanitarian applications, including VAWA self-petitions and battered spouse waivers, U-Visas, SIJS and asylum cases. Through our decades of experience working with immigrant survivors, we have learned that these applications, particularly U-Visas, can take years to decide before our clients receive employment authorization, during which time they are barred from receiving most public benefits. (At present, USCIS reports on its website that the processing time for U Visa applications is 51.5 months.) In our 2023 policy research report, *Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: The Impact of Work Authorization*, we documented the harm of systemic delays and the absence of a safety net to the immigrant survivors we interviewed, which only compound the violence they and their families have suffered. At the same time, the immigrant survivors we interviewed for the policy research report described how the availability and accessibility of certain benefits programs, legal representation, and other resources allowed them and their families to remain safe and stable. Legislation such as A.325/S.710 is key to extending vital assistance to our most vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers.



Her Justice is committed to advocating for a more equitable immigration system and resources necessary for our immigrant communities to thrive. For all the reasons above, we urge passage of A.325/S.710.

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