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Jayapal, Schakowsky, Espaillat, Panetta Introduce Legislation to Protect Immigrant Survivors of Violence

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representatives Pramila Jayapal (WA-07), Jan Schakowsky (IL-09), Adriano Espaillat (NY-13), and Jimmy Panetta (CA-20) today introduced the Working for Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (WISE) Act to protect immigrant survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based violence. The bill would ensure that immigrants have access to protections intended by the bipartisan Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA), and other federal and state laws. The bill would also move to ensure survivors pursuing relief are not detained or deported before their applications are fully adjudicated.

“The Trump administration’s mass deportation campaign has sowed immeasurable fear in immigrant communities, driving survivors of crime to hide in fear of deportation. That simply cannot be the case,” **said Jayapal**. “Immigrant women are

significantly more likely to suffer domestic violence, nearly three times the national average. Especially in the current environment, it is critical that we take steps to ensure that survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based violence are protected. The WISE Act would improve protections for immigrant witnesses and victims of crimes and foster safe communities — the opposite of what Trump is pushing.”

“Our immigrant communities are under attack by the Trump administration, and immigrant women faced with domestic violence make up one of the most vulnerable populations. These women should not feel forced to stay in violent, life-threatening intimate partner relationships because of their tenuous immigration status,” **said Schakowsky**. “I am proud to co-lead the WISE Act to help ensure that all victims of domestic violence, regardless of immigration status, have access to the public resources and support they need to escape abuse.”

“Immigrant families are facing tremendous challenges in light of the Trump administration, and we are working to combat these dangerous anti-American policies daily. Immigrant victims of domestic violence, trafficking, and gender-based assaults are particularly vulnerable and deserve protections regardless of their immigration status,” **said Espaillat**. “Immigrant survivors are less likely to report a crime in fear of detention and deportation, especially in this political climate, which makes them even more vulnerable to such abuse and exploitation. These crimes are dehumanizing and reprehensible, and we must do all that it takes to ensure protections are in place and victims feel empowered to seek assistance. I am proud to join my colleagues, once again, to introduce legislation this Congress to reaffirm our commitment to victims of violence when they need our help the most.”

“Our criminal justice system works when victims and witnesses have the will and confidence to come forward and testify to hold criminals accountable,” **said Panetta**. “In addition to being scared of retribution by criminals, there also are times when undocumented individuals are fearful of deportation due to their cooperation with law enforcement. That is why U and T visas are critical to putting away bad guys and giving people faith in our criminal justice system. I’m proud to be a part of the reintroduction of the WISE Act, which includes my Immigrant Witness and Victim Protection Act to strengthen safeguards and expand the availability of U and T visas. By ensuring that victims and witnesses have access to the protections of our government in their cooperation with law enforcement, we can hold criminals accountable and strengthen trust in our justice system.”

This bill introduction comes after President Donald Trump, in a proclamation for National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, blamed sexual violence on undocumented immigrants. However, studies have [found zero](#) evidence to support a link between undocumented immigrants and a rise in crime rates.

Immigrant women and children are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, and the [rate](#) of abuse against immigrant women is nearly 49 percent, three times the national average. While domestic violence is a consistently underreported issue, immigrant survivors are [significantly less likely](#) to report these crimes due to fear of deportation.

The WISE Act would strengthen protections for immigrant survivors by:

- [Eliminating arbitrary caps on the U Visa and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status \(SIJS\)](#).
- Expanding qualifying crimes for the U Visa to include hate crimes, child abuse, and elder abuse as well as grant protections for abused children, stepchildren, spouses, and parents of immigrant survivors.
- Granting work authorization to survivors while their applications are pending.
- Prohibiting detention and deportation of immigrant survivors while their cases are pending.
- Limiting the use or disclosure of information pertaining to a pending immigrant survivor's VAWA, T, U, or SIJ applications.
- Restricting immigration enforcement at certain protected areas including any domestic violence shelter, rape crisis center, supervised visitation center, family justice center, or victim services providers, among other locations.
- Ensuring survivors have the support necessary to thrive and reduce reliance on abusers by providing access to certain assistance, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), and Medicaid.

The legislation is sponsored by Yassamin Ansari (AZ-03), Becca Balint (VT-At Large), Nanette Barragán (CA-44), Salud Carbajal (CA-24), Greg Casar (TX-35), Sean Casten (IL-06), Joaquin Castro (TX-20), Judy Chu (CA-28), Jesús “Chuy” García (IL-04), Dan Goldman (NY-10), Val Hoyle (OR-04), Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr. (GA-04), Ro Khanna (CA-17), Sam Liccardo (CA-16), James P. McGovern (MA-02), Grace Meng (NY-06), Gwen Moore (WI-04), Kelly Morrison (MN-03), Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), Ilhan Omar (MN-05), Delia Ramirez (IL-03), Mary Gay Scanlon (PA-05), Lateefah Simon (CA-12), Adam Smith (WA-09), Melanie Stansbury (NM-01), Shri Thanedar (MI-13), Rashida Tlaib (MI-12), Nydia M. Velázquez (NY-07), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-25), and Nikema Williams (GA-05).

The WISE Act is also endorsed by Alianza Nacional de Campesinas; Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence; ASISTA Immigration Assistance; Bend the Arc: Jewish Action; Center for Gender & Refugee Studies; Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law; Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); Church World Service; Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA); Coalition on Human Needs; End SIJS Backlog Coalition; Esperanza United; Esperanza United; Freedom Network USA; Just Detention International; Just Solutions; Justice for Migrant Women; Justice in Motion; Kids in Need of Defense; Legal Momentum, The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund; Make the Road States; Naila Amin Foundation; National Alliance to End Sexual Violence; National Council of Jewish Women; National Immigrant Justice Center; National Immigration Law Center; National LGBTQ Institute on Intimate Partner Violence; National Network To End Domestic Violence; National

Partnership for New Americans.org ; National Resource Center on Domestic Violence; Oxfam America; Refugees International ; Sisters of Mercy Justice Team; Tahirih Justice Center; The Advocates for Human Rights; Ujima, The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community; VALOR; We Are All America; Women’s Refugee Commission; Young Center for Immigrant Children’s Rights; Al Otro Lado; Asian Resources, Inc.; Ayuda; California Partnership to End Domestic Violence; Center for Domestic Peace; Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Daya Inc.; DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Domestic Abuse Center; Domestic Violence Project | Urban Justice Center; East Bay Sanctuary Covenant; Equality California; Estrella del Paso; Gray’s Trauma-Informed Care Services Corp; Healthy Alternatives to Violent Environments; Her Justice; IL Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights; Immigrant Children Advocates’ Relief Effort (ICARE); Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef); Immigration Center for Women and Children; Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Jane Doe Inc.; Just Neighbors; Los Angeles LGBT Center; Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault; Maitri; Make the Road Connecticut ; Make the Road Nevada ; Make the Road New Jersey ; Make the Road New York ; Make the Road Pennsylvania ; Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence; Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault; National Organization for Women-Nassau County chapter; National Organization for Women-New York State; Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence; Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence; Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC); Northwest Workers’ Justice Project; Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV); Ohio Domestic Violence Network; Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Network; Raksha, Inc; Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network; Sanctuary for Families; Silver State Equality; Survivor Justice Center (formerly known as Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice); The Immigration Project; The Women’s Law Center of Maryland, Inc.; Utah Domestic Violence Coalition; Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; Violence Free Minnesota; Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance; Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Womankind; Workers Center of Central New York and; ZeroV.

If you or a loved one are experiencing domestic violence, help is available at 800-799-7233 or by texting START to 88788.

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