

Asian Journal

August 14, 2006

How Can an Immigrant Woman Leave Their Abusive Husband?

By Sharon Ann Bathan, Asianjournal.com

WOMEN looking to live free from fear and abuse can do it regardless of their status here in the United States. The law can provide protection to women whether they have a pending immigration status or if they don't have any legal status at all. Domestic violence is a crime against women that every woman has a right to escape from.

One major barrier to leaving an abusive relationship is lack of access to information on women's rights to be protected by the law.

Today's immigration law permits battered immigrant women to obtain their legal immigration without their husband. The Asian Pacific American Legal Center provides legal assistance in areas like family law such as divorce, child custody, restraining orders, child and spousal support; immigration law or housing law, consumer law and employment law.

The Asian Pacific American Legal Center was established in 1983 and has become the largest civil rights and legal aid organization nationwide that focuses on the Asian Pacific Islander and other immigrant communities with multi-lingual, culturally sensitive services and legal advocacy. The mission of APALC is to advocate for civil rights, provide legal services and education, and build coalitions to positively influence and impact Asian Americans.

For more than 20 years, APALC's multilingual staff, pro bono attorneys and law clerks have helped hundreds of immigrant women and children escape abusive relationships, find jobs and housing, and secure their legal status in the United States. Today, they even provide assistance to immigrants who are trafficked here for domestic work or sexual servitude.

APALC assist immigrant who suffered from physical, emotional, mental, sexual or economic abuse, or has been threatened with deportation by your abuser, there may be several immigration options to legalize status and get a green card. Battered women who are in petition thru marriage maybe be eligible for immigration relief and break free from the cycle of domestic violence. Congress has created a waiver on the joint petition requirement, which enables battered immigrant women to remove the conditional nature of their legal status and obtain permanent resident status without their abusive

home environment. There is another recently enacted legislation known as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA enables undocumented battered women and children to self-petition for permanent residency without any assistance from their abuser, as long as they meet certain requirements. These laws are created to provide protection to women and children so they stop being victims of their own homes.

APALC offers help to victims of domestic violence to obtain restraining orders, secure governments benefits, and find appropriate shelter and counseling.

If you're a Filipino who wants to know your rights as victims of violence, APALC can help you. They have Filipinos who can speak Tagalog to make you feel more comfortable in expressing your situation.

APALC also provides free consultation and referrals. They can review your legal documents, help you fill out legal reforms, prepare or file paperwork with the court, and negotiate on your behalf. In some cases they may be able to represent you in civil court or at an administrative hearing. The eligibility for their services depends if your income and resource level meets their eligibility guidelines. But if you're a victim of domestic violence, you may qualify for their services regardless of your income level. They also do not consider your immigration status in providing status.

To know more about the Asian Pacific American Legal Center you can make an appointment to schedule an interview. Call them Monday through Friday between the hours of 9 am to 5 pm at (213) 977-7500 and ask for Legal Services. (AJ)

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