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IMMIGRATION REFORM: AN ISSUE OF URGENCY

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Over 300 Organizations Committed to Ending Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking Write to House Majority Leadership Urging Immigration Reform

[Seventy-five percent of immigrants in the U.S. are women and children](#), including approximately 5 million women and 1.5 million children who are undocumented, a fact little known in the debates on immigration reform. Nevertheless, millions of women laboring in homes as domestic workers or care takers, as well as those working in hotels, restaurants, and in the fields harvesting crops, remain largely invisible. Highly vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, human trafficking and exploitation, women and children have been highly impacted by our government's inaction on reforming our immigration laws. Last summer, PBS Frontline and Univision released a documentary entitled "Rape in the Fields," following a year of investigative reporting. The documentary brought to light how half a million women laboring in the fields harvesting crops in the U.S., the majority of whom are undocumented, remain vulnerable to sexual assault and rape in the fields, often too afraid to come out of the shadows to report the crimes or seek help.

Abusive partners and opportunistic predators often exploit a victim's lack of immigration status as a way to maintain power and control, increase fear, and keep victims silent. The push for immigration reform is also a push for human rights to prevent the vulnerabilities to abuse and exploitation of all those living in the shadows.

Today, the Violence Against Women Immigration Task Force delivered [a letter](#) to the House Majority Leadership. The letter, signed by over 300 organizations, states in part:

As national, state, and local organizations committed to ending domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, we urge you to move forward in the House of Representatives with passage of an immigration reform bill. Congress has an opportunity, through immigration reform, to fix a broken system that leaves millions of undocumented women and children extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, both at home and in the workplace, and isolated from seeking help. It has been a year since the Senate passed a bipartisan immigration reform bill (S. 744), which includes a pathway to legal status and work authorization for millions of individuals, an increase in the U visa cap for victims of crime, better oversight of foreign labor recruiters, and many other significant improvements in protections for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. ***We are deeply concerned that without your leadership and support, this term of Congress will come to an end without much needed immigration reform.***

A comprehensive immigration reform bill will help strengthen families, communities, and the well-being of this nation. According to the authors of the letter, reform "will significantly enhance prevention and intervention efforts, by providing an opportunity for millions of immigrants to pursue a pathway to safety, stability, and economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their children."

Although House leadership has recently stated that immigration reform will not move forward this year, the letter, directed to House Speaker John Boehner, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, and Majority Leader-Elect Kevin McCarthy, aims to persuade House leadership that it is imperative to work in a bipartisan manner to pass immigration reform. The House and Senate were ultimately able to work in a bipartisan manner to pass the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in 2013. These organizations, and the thousands of advocates and community members that they represent, hope that Congress can still do the same with Immigration Reform.