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LEADING NATIONAL ADVOCATES DECRY HOUSE PASSAGE OF HR 4970:  
BILL THREATENS SAFETY AND JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Calls on Congress to Defend VAWA and Uphold Protections for Immigrant Victims of Violence

The Immigration Committee of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence decries today’s passage by the U.S. House of Representatives of a harmful bill that rolls back nearly 20 years of bipartisan efforts to protect immigrant victims of violence in the United States.

As part of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization process, the U.S. House of Representatives today passed HR 4970, a bill that threatens to put immigrant women’s lives at risk and significantly undermines longstanding protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and other violent crimes. We recognize the commitment and courage of the members who voted against this bill and especially recognize those who rose against partisanship to ensure victims have protection and to uphold the principles of VAWA. The Senate and House bills must now be reconciled in conference, one final opportunity for members of Congress to ensure that protections for immigrant victims of violence are strengthened.

“The bill the House passed today is not VAWA,” said Mony Ruiz-Velasco, co-chair of the immigration committee and director of legal services at Heartland Alliance’s National Immigrant Justice Center. “It betrays our country’s commitment to protect all victims of violence and threatens to place immigrant women’s lives at risk.” “We are devastated that provisions that will endanger vulnerable immigrant victims passed in the House today,” said Grace Huang, co-chair of the immigration committee and public policy coordinator for the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “For the first time in nearly 20 years, this bill would weaken crucial protections in VAWA for battered immigrants, putting them at risk of retaliation by their abusers and undermining law enforcement and public safety.”

As service providers, we must emphasize that this bill is not yet law. Until Congress passes a final VAWA reauthorization bill and President Obama signs it into law, the vital protections VAWA has long provided remain available to victims of violence. As legislators approach conference on S 1925 and HR 4970, we call on Congress to ensure a final VAWA reauthorization bill that advances protections for immigrant survivors and upholds the intent of VAWA. The courageous women and children survivors of violence that our programs and many others all over the country represent deserve no less.

Issued by the Immigration Committee of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, www.4vawa.org including the following members that are leading national experts on VAWA protections for immigrant survivors: ASISTA, Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers’ Guild, Tahirih Justice Center, and Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV). For additional information, contact Mony Ruiz-Velasco, National Immigrant Justice Center at mruizvelasco@heartlandalliance.org or Grace Huang, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence at grace@wscadv.org.