Victim Advocates Across the State Urge Rejection of Anti-Immigrant Bill

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Proposal would Silence Victims and Prevent Abusers and Sex Offenders from Being Reported

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Madison—Victim advocates from across Wisconsin are calling on legislators to reject the anti-immigrant, Arizona-copycat bill that was recently introduced in the state legislature. Advocates say the measure will make it even more unlikely that immigrant victims of domestic and sexual violence will come forward to report abuse, leaving the community less safe.

“Batterers and sex predators often tell immigrant victims that victims or their children will be deported if they contact authorities, said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). “If this bill were to pass, it would only increase and seemingly validate abusers’ threats and victims’ fear of law enforcement.”

Studies show that domestic violence can be more difficult to prevent in immigrant communities because immigrant victims have fewer opportunities for escape and support.

“There is already a palpable climate of fear among immigrant victims,” said Jeanie Kurka Reimer, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault. “When entire classes of people fear the police, we are all in trouble, because that means sex offenders and abusers are going unidentified.”

Even before the bill was introduced, over twenty local domestic and sexual violence victim advocacy agencies in the state had come out against the proposal. The agencies are from all corners of the Wisconsin.

“Federal law requires that advocates serve all victims, regardless of immigration status,” said Kurka Reimer.

Advocates also point to federal laws that give victims who cooperate with law enforcement the right to gain legal status.

“Congress realized we should encourage immigrant victims to come out from the shadows,” said Seger. “However, if this bill were to pass, Wisconsin would send exactly the opposite message.”

Regardless of the legislative outcome, victim advocates remain committed to protecting immigrant victims in Wisconsin.

“We oppose this bill because it will silence many victims, but no matter what, we will strive to give immigrant victims as much opportunity for safety and security as possible,” said Seger. “We will work with law enforcement and community groups to offer hope to all victims.”

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