

March 29, 2022
HB 2717
Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Oral In-Person Testimony
Proponent

Chairman Olson and Members of the Committee:

The Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (KCSDV) is a statewide non-profit organization whose membership is the 25 sexual and domestic violence programs serving victims across Kansas. KCSDV provides information, training, and analysis on issues impacting victims of domestic and sexual violence, their families, and their communities. Our members, the local advocacy programs, are committed to providing quality services to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, empowering victims to live independently without the ongoing fear of violence, and helping victims secure the resources necessary for a safe and healthy future.

Victims of sexual and domestic violence who are immigrants often find themselves in uniquely vulnerable positions because of their immigration status. Trust and support from both the community and their neighbors can play a critical role in finding safety. While they are still in abusive relationships, they are susceptible to threats and coercion by their offenders. Abusers often use an immigrant survivor's status or lack thereof as a tool to exert control over their victims. This can come in many insidious forms. When applying for access to the United States, a fiancé visa can require a sponsoring citizen to vouch for their significant other. Many abusers hold this over the heads of their spouses. Even those who did not sponsor their partner's access to the country will utilize threats of deportation as a tool to force compliance on the part of their victim.

Some immigrants do not know or understand their rights or the customs and cultures of American society, or life here in Kansas. Congress has provided several remedies for immigrant victims of crime, all of which involve building trust and working with an advocate, lawyer, or law enforcement officer. Any efforts that can be made to welcome immigrants give them another potential pathway to safety.

Accessing our judicial system can be complex and intimidating for all victims. It is even more challenging for someone who does not understand the language or know the laws. Many immigrants come from countries where corruption in the government is commonplace. This can result in an inherent distrust of government and government officials. Without sufficient education and support here in Kansas and the United States, there is no way for immigrant survivors to build trust with our system sufficient to avail themselves of the protections available

to them under the law. Supporting measures that make the local jurisdiction more friendly and welcoming to survivors creates a place where they can feel safe pursuing legal remedies available to them. Passing laws at the state level that discourage these measures sends a message to survivors that they are not welcome.

Community support can make the difference between pursuing a safe future free of abuses for all survivors. Our laws should reflect how strongly we as a state value the safety and well-being of all those who live here, especially our most vulnerable populations.

In summary, KCSDV believes that the passage of HB 2717 would be detrimental to immigrant survivors of sexual and domestic violence and would urge you to consider all the implications of passing this bill.

Sincerely submitted on behalf of KCSDV,

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