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Trump Administration Turns It's Back on Survivors Seeking Asylum, Advocates Remain Committed to Safety for All

Madison – In the last week, the Trump Administration once again demonstrated its antipathy towards victims of abuse and trafficking and those seeking asylum in the United States with several unprecedented announcements that will jeopardize survivors' ability to safely enter the country and seek available legal protections to which they are entitled. In the first of two controversial moves, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that it will begin implementing its Notice to Appear (NTA) Memo with respect to T-Visas, U-Visas, VAWA self-petitions, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and other humanitarian petitions on November 19, 2018.

Following this change in policy, minors as well as victims of human trafficking, domestic violence and sexual assault who applied for, but were denied, protective status may now be subject to deportation, a policy that was up to this point widely viewed as inhumane. This will have a chilling effect on applications for humanitarian relief, longstanding forms of protection for vulnerable families created by a bipartisan Congress. Furthermore, this chilling effect impedes law enforcements ability to detect, investigate and prosecute domestic violence in our communities. While there is a chance that this new policy memo could change before an ultimate decision is made, those with pending applications and those considering applying for protective status are encouraged to speak with a licensed immigration attorney if they have questions.

Additionally, the administration announced last week that it will bar from asylum anyone who enters the U.S. anywhere except at a port of entry, a move that flies in the face of U.S. law established by Congress decades ago and jeopardizes the safety of numerous vulnerable families who are lawfully seeking out protection from persecution and violence. Representatives of End Domestic Abuse WI, the statewide coalition representing domestic violence shelters across Wisconsin, and RISE Law Center, a legal aid office for immigrant and undocumented survivors of violence, expressed their

extreme disapproval of these changes which are sure to put victims of violence and their children directly in harm's way.

“The idea that we as a nation are implementing limits on the ability of families fleeing abuse, trafficking and sexual assault to seek refuge here in the United States is an affront to human decency, particularly given the fact that so much of the instability and violence that survivors are escaping from can be directly linked to U.S. involvement in these regions,” said Patti Seger, Executive Director of End Domestic Abuse WI. “While we have come to expect this behavior from the current administration, we hope people across the country will stand up and take action to oppose these policies which represent the absolute worst of our nation’s legacy of white supremacy, nationalism, xenophobia, bigotry and violence. All people have a right to safety and basic human dignity, and I want to make it clear that advocates across Wisconsin will always be here to honor and serve survivors, regardless of their immigration status or country of origin.”

As the Tahirih Justice Center has noted, migrants traveling from Central America are coming from one of the most dangerous regions in the world for women and children, who are often specifically targeted for rape, sex trafficking, domestic abuse, and other crimes. The families who approach the southern border seeking asylum therefore qualify as refugees under the 1951 International Refugee Convention. They are often fleeing for their lives and do not have the luxury of arriving to the U.S. at a port of entry.

“Many of our clients are survivors of sexual or domestic violence who have applied for legal protective status, including seeking asylum and visas created for victims of violence and human trafficking as a means to help law enforcement. These immigration opportunities created to enforce human rights already hold strict standards and take years to process. The idea that we are now adding further limitations to that process is truly disheartening,” said Robin Dalton, Senior Immigration Attorney at RISE Law Center. “These recent announcements by the Trump administration are the exact opposite of what our clients need. The families we serve deserve nothing less than a humane immigration system that honors the experience of all survivors and ensures that all asylum seekers are treated with dignity.”

The Trump administration has attempted to justify the new rules by claiming that the entry of migrants is a matter of national security. At this point there is no apparent evidence to support any claim that the migrants who may be trying to seek entry to the U.S. pose any threat to the country.

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End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence is the leading voice for victims of domestic abuse in Wisconsin. At End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, we educate shelter and program volunteers and advocates, law enforcement, legislators, and community members to provide safety and support to survivors. We strive to shift Wisconsin from the attitudes and beliefs that cause domestic violence to values of mutual respect and equality, and we partner with communities in the effort to prevent and end domestic abuse.

We encourage reporters to include the National Domestic Violence Hotline number [1-800-799-SAFE(7233)] in their stories for victims who need help. A list of local Wisconsin domestic violence victim service providers can be found at <http://www.endabusewi.org>.