

AIS Opposes Amendments limiting people from accessing public benefits, housing, healthcare, unemployment, tax credits, and more

The [Alliance for Immigrant Survivors](#) (AIS) advocates for a future where everyone, regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, country of origin, or differing ability can live in safety and thrive. We defend and advocate for policies that ensure immigrant survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape, human trafficking, and other gender-based violence have access to safety, autonomy, and life-saving protections.

Every year, we see anti-immigrant amendments introduced in legislative and budgetary processes that would hinder immigrants' access to legal status and increase their vulnerability to exploitation. We strongly oppose any amendment that interferes with the ability of immigrant survivors to seek safety and provide for themselves and their families, including the example described below. For questions, follow-up, and media inquiries, please contact us at info@immigrantsurvivors.org.

AIS strongly opposes amendments limiting people from accessing public benefits, housing, healthcare, unemployment, tax credits, and more.

We oppose any efforts to limit immigrant communities from being able to access basic needs, such as public benefits, housing, healthcare, unemployment, tax credits, and more. For immigrant survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape, human trafficking, and other gender-based violence, access to economic and social supports ensure they can escape and overcome violence. In fact, strengthening economic supports for families is one of only a few strategies highlighted by the CDC for preventing and reducing the harm of intimate partner violence.⁵

The ability of survivors to meet basic needs is central to their decision-making about whether or not they can leave an abusive relationship. Two-thirds (67%) of survivors in one survey said that they stayed longer than they wanted or returned to an abusive relationship because of financial concerns, such as not being able to pay bills, afford rent/mortgage, or feed their family.⁶ Preventing survivors from accessing services or benefits because of their immigration status re-victimizes survivors and

⁵ Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁶ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, *We Would Have Had to Stay: Survivors' Economic Security and Access to Public Benefits Programs (2018)*, Available at: https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-11/NRCDV_PublicBenefits-WeWouldHaveHadToStay-Nov2018.pdf

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their children, prevents recovery, prolongs ongoing trauma, and harms the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Many survivors already struggle with economic instability, and abuse can force survivors to fall into or deeper into poverty because the consequences have undermined their ability to work or attain financial security. Many survivors face abusive partners who actively prevent or sabotage them from obtaining economic independence as a means of power and control.⁷ Violent partners of immigrant survivors often engage in economic abuse by prohibiting their survivors from learning English or working outside the home,⁸ or by withholding immigration papers or pathways to legal employment. Survivors may be forced to be economically dependent, take lower paying jobs, or be more susceptible to exploitation and harassment at their job. Ending an abusive relationship therefore might mean losing access to income, and leaving may require additional out-of-pocket costs that are not within reach. *When survivors have access to their own economic supports, they are more empowered to leave abusive situations and build a healthier and safer future for themselves and their families.*

Housing is also critical to survivors' ability to seek safety, stability, and recovery. Domestic violence is a primary cause of homelessness for women and children in the United States.⁹ Over 90% of homeless women report having experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence in their lives, while over 50% of homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.¹⁰ The National Network to End Domestic Violence reports that 65% of survivors' average daily unmet requests for help from domestic violence programs nationwide are for housing related services.¹¹ Securing non-subsidized housing can be particularly difficult for survivors. Landlords may be reluctant to rent to survivors who do not have their own credit or rental history. Survivors may be susceptible to manipulation by landlords who charge them high rents for single rooms in unsafe conditions. Overcrowding in shelters, or rules prohibiting

⁷ A.M. Moe & M.P. Bell, *Abject economics: The Effects of Battering and Violence on Women's Work and Employability*, 10 *Violence Against Women*, 29-55 (2004); J.L. Postmus, S.B. Plummer, S. McMahon, N.S. Murshid, & M.S. Kim, *Understanding Economic Abuse in the Lives of Survivors*. 27 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 411-430 (2012); A.M. Stylianou, J.L. Postmus, & S. McMahon, *Measuring Abusive Behaviors: Is Economic Abuse a Unique Form of Abuse?* 28 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 3186-3204 (2013).

⁸ C. Menjivar, & O. Salcido, *Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence: Common Experiences in Different Countries*, 16 *Gender and Society* 6, 898-920 (2002).

⁹J.L. Jasinski, J. Wesely, E. Mustaine, & J.D. Wright, *The Experience of Violence in the Lives of Homeless Women: A Research Report*, Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice (2005); see also U.S. Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: A 25-City Survey* (Dec. 2014), <https://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/655b9350-995e-4aae-acd3-298325093c34.pdf>.

¹⁰ Monica McLaughlin & Debbie Fox, *National Network to End Domestic Violence, Housing Needs of Victims of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, and Stalking* (2019), https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2019/06-02_Housing-Needs-Domestic-Violence.pdf.

¹¹ 2018 statistics show 72,245 victim requests for assistance per day; 11,441 requests are unmet, and of those, 7,416 are for housing. Available at <https://nnedv.org/content/domestic-violence-counts-12th-annual-census-report/>; See also National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, 2016 internet survey of rape crisis centers from all 50 states, Washington D.C. and two territories

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children with disabilities from residing there, drive many survivors to homelessness. Others face discrimination such that either no one will rent to them, or they cannot have their name on a lease or utility bills.¹²

In seeking healthcare, onerous barriers to access already disproportionately harm immigrant women, who are the majority of immigrants and who are particularly likely to be low-income, young, and uninsured. One-third of noncitizen immigrant women ages 15-44 are uninsured. For women in that group who are also low income, that proportion grows to almost half.¹³In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, for example, immigrant survivors and their family members, like other immigrants, are avoiding COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination based on concerns about the cost of care, and fears related to their immigration status.¹⁴In a survey of immigrant households in Massachusetts, nearly 42% of respondents said that no one in the household had been tested or treated for COVID-19; instead, if someone fell ill, they would take care of them at home on their own. On a follow up question, one out of six people responded that they did not get tested because they were uninsured and worried about the cost.¹⁵

Instead of supporting these anti-immigrant amendments, Members of Congress can choose to stand with immigrant survivors of violence by enhancing immigrant protections, including those featured in our [top 5 asks for immigrant survivors](#):

1. Lifting the cap on the number of U visas annually available – currently limited to 10,000 – to meet the need;
2. Funding USCIS to ensure they can grant timely employment authorization to VAWA self-petitioners, U and T visa applicants;
3. Preventing detention and deportation of survivors seeking asylum and eligible VAWA self-petitioners, U and T visa applicants;
4. Explicitly including survivors of gender-based violence in asylum law; and
5. Ensuring access to economic supports for immigrant survivors.

¹² Kasturirangan, A., Krishnan, S., and Riger, S., (2004) The Impact of Culture and Minority Status on Women's Experience of Domestic Violence, *Trauma Violence & Abuse* 5, 318-332.

¹³ Guttmacher Institute, *Immigrant women need health coverage, not legal barriers*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.guttmacher.org/infographic/2018/immigrant-women-need-health-coverage-not-legal-barriers-0>. Low-income women are those in families with incomes under the federal poverty level (\$20,420 for a family of three in 2017). Data include some information on undocumented immigrants, although that information is generally acknowledged to be a considerable undercount of that population group.

¹⁴ Ms Magazine (2020), *For Immigrant Survivors, the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic is Life-Threatening in Other Ways*, see <https://msmagazine.com/2020/04/14/for-immigrant-survivors-the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-life-threatening-in-other-ways/>

¹⁵ Community Survey: The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrants in Massachusetts, see <https://www.miracoalition.org/resources/covid19/community-survey-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-immigrants-in-ma-ss/>