

National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women

Co-Chaired by the following organizations

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National Network Commends Senate for Historic Immigration Vote, But Serious Flaws Need Correcting

On May 25, the U.S. Senate voted (62 to 36) to approve the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S.2611). In stark contrast to the punitive House bill passed last December (H.R. 4437), the Senate Bill contains many positive elements for comprehensive immigration reform.

Senate passes historic bipartisan immigration bill

Leslye Orloff, Director of Legal Momentum’s Immigrant Women Program, said, “We commend the bipartisan group of Senators for putting millions of immigrant women and children on a path to permanent residency and U.S. citizenship. This is a major step forward that is vital to providing immigrant women and children options for economic security that will ultimately enhance their safety, especially those who are victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, trafficking, or persecution.”

Among other forward-thinking measures, the Senate bill would: legalize an estimated 8 to 8.5 million undocumented immigrants and their close family members over the next six to eight years; reunite close relatives separated by out-of-date family immigration system within the next six years; create legal channels for future flows of migration so that workers do not have to resort to false documents and smugglers; allow undocumented students the same chance at higher education as their peers; and put undocumented farmworkers on a path to permanent residency.

Punitive enforcement provisions must be eliminated for immigration reform to work

The Senate bill does, however, contain many punitive enforcement provisions that endanger immigrant women and children, and violate due process. As made clear by Gail Pendleton, Co-Director of the Advanced Special Immigrant Survivors Technical Assistance, “The National

Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women will continue to work to improve the immigration legislation as it proceeds to a Senate/House conference committee. While we support the Senate bill moving forward, we intend to fight for changes to make it more effective and fair for all immigrants.” Pendleton outlined a variety of reservations with certain aspects of the Senate immigration bill including expansion of state and local police in the enforcement of complex immigration laws, increased detention and deportation of immigrants without individualized consideration or due process, and criminalization of immigrants for minor immigration documentation and registration violations. “These are not trivial matters.” said Pendleton. “We will insist that House and Senate conferees address these concerns, and we will not accept legislation that splits the difference between the Senate and House bills.”

Leni Marin, Managing Director of the Family Violence Prevention Fund, expressed deep concerns about the addition of an English-only provision to the Senate bill which establishes English as the “national language.” The provision does nothing to help immigrants master English and may erect major obstacles for immigrant victims of violence seeking police protection, court orders, medical treatment, and mental health services.

Senate-House conferees must pass a COMPREHENSIVE immigration reform bill

Immigration reform will now be taken up by a Senate-House conference committee that will attempt to bridge the chasm between the two bills. The House bill (H.R. 4437) contains many harsh punitive provisions not included in the Senate bill, including the criminalization of unlawful status as well as the criminalization of anyone aiding an undocumented immigrant. H.R. 4437 also contains no legalization program.

The National Network urges Congress to respond to the growing immigrants’ rights movement in cities and towns, large and small, across the country. As Leslye Orloff, Director of Legal Momentum’s Immigrant Women Program, said, “Immigrant women and children and the rest of the country want comprehensive immigration reform that honors our country’s tradition as a nation of immigrants and as a protector of victims of violence or persecution.”

The National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women is comprised of over 3,000 professionals nationwide including police, sheriffs, district attorneys, probation officers, prosecutors, health providers, faith-based organizations, rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, mental health professionals, child protective services workers, and immigrant rights’ groups. The Network’s members are joined together by a common purpose -- working towards the eradication of all forms of violence perpetrated against immigrant women and children including domestic abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, and stalking.