

May 14, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of the undersigned faith leaders and faith-based organizations concerned about victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, and other forms of violence, we write to express our concerns about Title VIII of the House Judiciary Committee-approved version of H.R. 4970, legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which we understand the House of Representatives plans to vote on this week.

Faith communities are on the front lines, identifying victims, providing refuge, referring victims and their families for services, and offering hope and healing. In times of crisis, victims often turn to faith leaders for support and moral guidance because they see places of worship as a sanctuary from the horrors they have experienced. Through our ministry with victims, we have learned that abusers often exploit a victim's immigration status, leaving individuals extremely vulnerable and afraid to report the abuse to law enforcement, assist in the prosecution of crimes, and seek services.

Congress created VAWA in 1994, and it has voted twice since then to reauthorize the law, each time with broad bipartisan support. However, we are deeply troubled by Title VIII of H.R. 4970. Sections 801, 802, and 806 would actually roll back protections in current law for battered non-citizens, making them more vulnerable and, in some cases, endangering their lives. We urge you to strike these provisions from the bill before the measure is brought before the full House of Representatives for a vote.

VAWA is an effective tool in combatting the devastating crimes of domestic violence and providing lifesaving programs and services. We urge Congress to preserve and improve protections for vulnerable immigrant victims.

Sincerely,

Richard T. Foltin
Director of National and Legislative Affairs
American Jewish Committee

Rev. John L. McCullough
Executive Director and CEO
Church World Service

Rev. Larry Snyder
President
Catholic Charities USA

Wendy Tarr
Director
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

Rev. Ronald J. Degges
President
Disciples Home Missions
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston
Director
Disciples Justice Action Network

Noel Castellanos
CEO
Christian Community Development Association

Alex Baumgarten
Director of Government Relations
The Episcopal Church

Luis Cortes
President
Esperanza

Alexia Salvatierra
Director of Justice Ministries
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Patrick Carolan
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Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Orlando Crespo
National Director
La Fe Multi-Ethnic Ministries
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Janet Mock, CSJ
Executive Director
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Linda Hartke
President and CEO
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach
Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington
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Salam Al-Marayati
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Leith Anderson
President
National Association of Evangelicals

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez
President
National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

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Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Sr. Esther Anderson, OSF
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Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Jim Wallis
President and CEO
Sojourners

Rev. Peter Morales
President
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Jim Winkler
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United Methodist Church, General Board of Church
and Society

Johnny Young
Executive Director
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Lynne Hybels
Willow Creek Community Church

Deborah Fikes
Executive Advisor
World Evangelical Alliance

Stephan Bauman
President and CEO
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