

May 7, 2012

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2138 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
B-351 Rayburn  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers,

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 H.R. 4970, legislation to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which we understand the House Committee on the Judiciary plans to mark up tomorrow.

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 communities and 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, as introduced. Title VIII contains many provisions that actually would 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,

Noel Castellanos  
CEO  
Christian Community Development  
Association

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

Wendy Tarr  
Director  
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

Alex Baumgarten  
Director of Government Relations  
The Episcopal Church

Luis Cortes  
President  
Esperanza

Alexia Salvatierra  
Director of Justice Ministries  
Southwest California Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Patrick Carolan  
Executive Director  
Franciscan Action Network

Gideon Aronoff  
President and CEO  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Orlando Crespo  
National Director  
La Fe Multi-Ethnic Ministries  
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

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 Office

Salam Al-Marayati  
President  
Muslim Public Affairs Council

Leith Anderson  
President  
National Association of Evangelicals

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez  
President  
National Hispanic Christian Leadership  
Conference

Rev. Gabriel Salguero  
President  
National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Simone Campbell  
Executive Director  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social  
Justice Lobby

Jean Stokan  
Director  
Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

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

Jim Wallis  
President and CEO  
Sojourners

Rev. Peter Morales  
President  
Unitarian Universalist Association of  
Congregations

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

Johnny Young  
Executive Director  
Migration and Refugee Services  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Lynne Hybels  
Willow Creek Community Church

Deborah Fikes  
Executive Advisor  
World Evangelical Alliance

Stephan Bauman  
President and CEO  
World Relief