



Help • Hope • Healing

June 28, 2023

Dear members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives:

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) works to eliminate all forms of sexual violence and advocates for the rights of sexual assault victims. We partner with and represent the network of rape crisis centers that provide services to victims of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth.

Today, we write to express our strong support of HB 1371, *Providing Clarity and Consistency for U-Visa Applicants*, sponsored by Representative Joseph Hohenstein. We ask for you to support this legislation when it is considered in the House of Representatives and are grateful to see its movement this week.

Undocumented and refugee children and adults face alarming risks of trafficking, abuse, and assault. Everyone deserves a life free from trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. All victims of these violent crimes deserve safety, care, and justice. The vitality of our communities depends on the ability for each of our members to thrive in their lives and to care for their families and loved ones.

Investigating and prosecuting violent crime brings individuals to justice and enhances the safety of all victims and our larger communities. However, victims are often afraid to come forward and report what happened to them. Delayed reporting is common due to fear of further violence and harm, stigma, shame, and the re-victimization, or victim-blaming, that occurs throughout our society. These barriers obstruct victims' safety and healing. They also undermine the reporting of violent crime to law enforcement and therefore, the ability to investigate and resolve crime in our communities—crimes like drug and human trafficking, sexual assault and abuse, and domestic violence.

Federal U-visas are critically important to law enforcement as they investigate and prosecute dangerous criminal activity in our communities. U-visa protections are available to victims who cooperate with law enforcement. U-visas help victims, law enforcement, and communities by supporting victim's stability, enhancing individual safety, supporting the investigation of violent crime, and enhancing public safety. This helps protect victims and their children. Investigation of violent crime will be supported through this process by enhancing the evidence available to law enforcement and district attorneys, potentially resulting in a more thorough investigation and greater degree of accountability. Public safety will be enhanced by apprehending individuals who have committed violent crimes such as drug and human

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trafficking, sexual assault and abuse, and domestic violence. This may help resolve crimes in other jurisdictions.

A victim-centered approach to the U-Visa process will enable victims of sexual abuse, assault and harassment to break through their isolation, report violent crime to law enforcement, and participate in its successful investigation. If passed, this legislation would build upon existing law and help to protect victims of trafficking, abuse, and assault throughout the Commonwealth. It would allow for consistent certification procedures reducing their risk of ongoing harm and abuse. It will strengthen Pennsylvania's U-Visa process and expand the safety of victims through language access, requirements for processing timeframes, record keeping and victim notification. It would enable Pennsylvania to better implement federal law and increase victims' access to U-visas.

We urge you to support HB 1371 and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Gabriella Romeo  
Public Policy Director  
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape