

February 4, 2021

Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee,

Missions Inc. Programs strongly supports HF 321 (Feist), a bill to require certifying entities to timely process visa certification documents. We provide a collaborative community and safe space where people are empowered to heal and transform their lives. Our vision is a world where every person realizes their worth and lives with dignity free from addiction and abuse. In pursuit of that vision, we provide shelter and supportive services to victims of domestic violence and individuals experiencing chemical dependency and operate an all-male skilled nursing facility in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties.

Since it began in 2003, our Immigrant and Refugee program has provided crucial safety planning, civil and criminal legal advocacy, and assistance in navigating immigration court to victims of domestic violence in our community who are immigrants and refugees. These victims face unique challenges to seeking help, including language barriers, cultural stigma, and fear that interacting with law enforcement will result in deportation. Many of our clients are unaware of their own immigration status because their partner has deceived or withheld information from them.

In order to qualify for a U visa, an applicant must provide a signed police certification stating that they were the victim of a crime. A victim's experience obtaining this certification varies wildly based on the jurisdiction in which the crime took place. In jurisdictions where advocates have an existing relationship with local police departments and where law enforcement officers are cognizant of the dynamics of domestic violence, this process can be quick and painless. In other jurisdictions, victims can wait months for their certification request to be processed with limited communication from the law enforcement agency and no idea when they can expect the certification to be processed. During this time, they are unable to take the next step in the U visa application process, which overall can take multiple years.

This delay is not simply a matter of inconvenience or impatience. Being approved for a U visa is lifechanging and often life-saving for the victims we work with. Once their application is approved, they can live without fear of deportation or separation from their children. They can find employment to build financial resources independent of their partner – which is crucial to their safety within the relationship as well as their ability to leave the relationship if they choose to do so. While waiting for their U visa application to be processed, victims may experience additional or worsening abuse, threats



MISSIONS INC.
PROGRAMS



Domestic Violence Services
Chemical Dependency Services
Skilled Nursing Care

of retaliation against themselves or their families in their country of origin, extended stays in shelter, unstable housing with friends or relatives, or forced prostitution.

Standardized timelines and transparent processes for certification by local law enforcement agencies would be a meaningful step towards safety and justice for victims of domestic violence who are immigrants or refugees. We support HF 321 because we believe it will significantly contribute to the safety and stability of the individuals we work with. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. If you have any additional questions, we would be happy to discuss this topic further with you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Busch, MSW, LGSW

Community Engagement & Outreach Coordinator

