

Deputy of Police Operations Pete Helein, Appleton, WI P.D.
Statement in Support of U-Visas, T-Visas, and VAWA Self-Petitions

Served as Appleton Wisconsin Police Chief 2012-2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Deputy Chief of Operations with the Appleton Wisconsin Police Department. I have served in a wide variety of positions over my 28.5 years of service. I still wear a standard duty uniform to work every day and get plenty of “boot time” in the community. However, a significant amount of my time is spent in an executive leadership role in my community.

I consider U-visa legislation an invaluable vehicle to work closely with victims to prevent crime, save lives, and hold violent offenders’ accountable—strategies consistent with the philosophy of community policing. A significant number of immigrants that are victims of crime often do not report those crimes to law enforcement because of overwhelming fear, lack of trust, threat of physical harm to self and/or children, threat of deportation, and threat of losing custody of children.

When the fear of deportation and exploitation is reduced, immigrant crime victims feel safe identifying violent criminal offenders. When more violent criminals are identified, investigated, and prosecuted for committing violent crimes, additional U-visa certifications will be needed to help protect the lives of courageous immigrant victims. The U-visa cap of 10,000 was reached in September of 2011. When the number of requests for certifications exceeds the cap of 10,000, immigrant crime victims are forced to wait. Waiting can be dangerous. The delay provides violent criminal offenders, and the friends and families of violent criminal offenders, with the opportunity to use physical violence and death threats to convince crime victims not to testify. When criminals have additional time to terrorize crime victims and convince them not to participate in a criminal investigation or prosecution, more and more violent offenders go free.

I strongly urge an increase in the number of U-visa’s granted on an annual basis so that more violent criminal offenders can be arrested and held accountable. Law enforcement will identify and investigate 10,000 more criminals a year if the cap on U-visas is increased leading to more prosecutions and ultimately more convictions.

For the past 25 years, I have been training law enforcement officers across the country on investigating violent crimes against women and children, community policing, interstate enforcement of protection orders, federal firearms violations, and the U-visa process. As a U-visa trainer, I work closely with Legal Momentum and the Vera Institute of Justice to provide law enforcement officers around the country with training focused on the U-visa process. I also continue to work with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National College of District Attorneys, the National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit, and the Battered Women’s Justice Project.

The U-visa is a Crime Reduction Strategy

In June 2011, I was part of a U-visa law enforcement training session held in Alexandria, Virginia. When asked the question, "How has the U-visa process helped you?" an officer from a D.C. Metro area law enforcement agency described an experience he had working with an undocumented immigrant victim of domestic violence and sexual assault. The officer worked with the victim through the initial stage of the U-visa process. The officer shared how he was able to develop the trust of the victim, and how the victim was helpful to the case. That trust ultimately led the victim to voluntarily tell the officer that several gang members had offered a reward for the murder of the officer. The trust between the victim and the officer saved the officers life.

Another officer in that same training class spoke about a victim of domestic violence with whom he worked to establish her trust and cooperation. Not only did the reported domestic violence lead to the arrest of a violent offender, the victim shared additional information which provided law enforcement with the evidence needed to take down a major human trafficking ring.

Law enforcement officers throughout the country are dedicated to "Fighting Crime and Solving Problems." Officers understand that crime is predictable and anything that is predictable may in fact be preventable.

Successful law enforcement agencies continue to embrace the philosophy of Community Policing. Community Policing is based on: proactively recognizing opportunities to prevent crime; empowering the community to help fight crime and solve problems; addressing issues and behaviors impacting the quality of life; establishing collaborative networkers with key community stakeholders; and, treating people with dignity and respect.

The U-visa should be considered a "crime-fighting tool" because it improves law enforcement's ability to detect, investigate, and prosecute criminal offenders. The strategy acts as a catalyst to reduce crime. Reduced crime rates are met with reduced costs to police departments and to communities. More importantly, U-visa's help save lives by empowering crime victims to identify violent criminals. Among the lives saved are the lives of the men and women of law enforcement who are in harm's way when they repeatedly respond to violent crimes committed by the same offender.

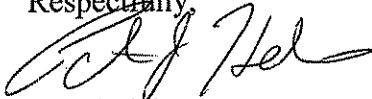
Building trust between the immigrant community and law enforcement

Crime should be considered a community issue, requiring a community response based on mutual trust. People solve crimes when they share information with law enforcement. However, to share information you must be able to trust law enforcement officers. People trust law enforcement officers when they feel safe and are treated with dignity and respect, fundamental principles of Community Policing.

The fear of deportation can no longer be used to control the lives of immigrant women and children. Law enforcement officers must exercise due diligence and work hard to forge relationships based on trust. Increased crime reporting rates leads to increased arrest and prosecution rates thus resulting in an improved quality of life for everyone

I consider meeting the cap of 10,000 U-visas as confirmation that 10,000 violent criminal offenders, living in neighborhoods throughout our country, were identified by courageous immigrant crime victims. I strongly urge you and other policymakers to recognize U-visas as crime fighting tools.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete Helein", written in a cursive style.

Pete Helein

Deputy Chief Pete Helein (Biography)

Pete Helein is a Deputy Chief with the Appleton Police Department. He has more than 28 years of law enforcement experience with the Appleton Police Department serving as a Patrol Officer, Police School Liaison Officer, Resource Development Unit Specialist, Accreditation Manager, Operations Supervisor, Commander of the Northern Police District, Commander of the Detective Bureau, Commander of the Downtown and Southern Districts and Deputy Chief of Operations.

Helein was a past recipient of the State of Wisconsin Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award. He served on the Department's SWAT team for 15 years as a general member, team leader, assistant commander, and ultimately as the commander of the Team. He currently serves on Wisconsin's Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. Helein received a Bachelor of Science Degree from Northern Michigan University and a Master of Science Degree from Eastern Kentucky University.

Helein is a consultant for the National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit. He worked on the Prosper Project and the Promising Practices Initiative where he was responsible for working with a team of consultants to evaluate the policies and practices of law enforcement agencies throughout the United States.

Deputy Chief Helein has conducted an extensive amount of training throughout the United States on Victims' Rights, Domestic Violence, and Community Policing. He represented the Appleton Police Department in an alliance with the Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs and the Wisconsin Department of Justice to implement strategies that were developed to integrate the philosophy of community policing to meet the needs of domestic abuse victims. Helein traveled to Kurgan, Russia to lead a training team that was awarded an International Domestic Violence Prevention Training Program Grant by Sister Cities International. The training initiative focused on establishing a domestic abuse shelter, the creation of multi-specialty work groups, and promoting violence prevention and awareness.

Helein served on Wisconsin's Crime Victim Council for more than 12 years. As Chairman of the Council, he worked with a dedicated team to develop and introduce a comprehensive victims' rights legislative package, Assembly Bill 342, to support Wisconsin's Constitutional Amendment for crime victims.