FVC – Access to Benefits for Immigrant Survivors Workgroup Meeting

State of Maryland

Victim Services for Immigrant Survivors Survey

Open-ended Questions and Answers Summary

1. **For the barriers identified in questions 10 and 13, what are you doing to mitigate them? Do you have any suggestions to overcome them?***

The responses reflect a commitment to assisting individuals in need, particularly those facing barriers such as language limitations and immigration-related challenges. They highlight the importance of tailoring services to specific populations and advocating for policy changes to improve access to public benefits. Additionally, collaboration with other agencies and community organizations is emphasized as a means to better support clients.

*Mentioned in several answers

Case Management and Referrals:

Respondents often mentioned making referrals to other organizations when they do not work or offer a type of service.

- Working with non-profits that provide assistance to immigrants.*
- Referring individuals to housing resources and making connections to service providers.*
- Advocacy programs and offering information and referrals to clients.
- Assistance with initial procedures and more resources.

Accompaniment

Respondents mentioned advocacy for clients and accompanying them to ensure they receive eligible benefits as a suggestion to overcome barriers, and also:

- Client accompaniment to apply for services or to inquire about the services.
- Partnering with other agencies to provide support.*
- Transportation can be a barrier. Therefore, accompaniment is important.
- Clear communication and management of expectations.

Language Barriers and Access to Services:*

Language limitations and lack of language access services are identified as primary barriers. Respondents mention suggestions to overcome barriers:

- The need for more availability of translators.*
- Advocating for having Spanish-speaking staff in social services offices.

- Identifying and hiring bilingual/bicultural case workers.
- Advocating for having a language line.

Access to Public Benefits:

- They make efforts to help immigrants obtain immigration status and access benefits.
- There is a need for more available housing and rental assistance for foreign-born individuals.
- Facilitating the application process for public benefits and community resources.
- Suggestions for Legislative changes
    - Issues related to obtaining social security cards and access to benefits. Benefits are terminated for not having a Social Security card. Not having an SSN should not lead to automatic termination of benefits.
    - Programs for immigrants should be tailored to the specific needs of each immigrant group.
    - Suggestions for eligibility based on residency rather than citizenship or immigration status.

Advocacy and Training:

Respondents mentioned the need for training and education for service providers and public benefits agencies:

- Challenges with government employees not knowing immigrant eligibility for benefits.*
- Educating clients about their rights and available benefits.
- Expanding knowledge and creating alliances with other organizations for support.
- Efforts to educate the community and expand knowledge.

2. **What are some common reasons you have experienced that agencies did not sign a U visa certification? Write N/A if this does not apply to you. ***

The responses indicate several common reasons agencies or officials may not sign U visa certifications. These reasons can be categorized as follows:

Lack of Understanding and Knowledge:

- Lack of a clear understanding of the U visa certification process.*
- Failure to read through the government guides issued by USCIS.
- Lack of knowledge of U visa qualifying criteria.
- Lack of training for local officials, such as the Department of Labor or Child Protective Services.*
- Uncertainty or reluctance to be involved in the certification process.
- Agencies or officials who do not believe in victim abuse.
- CPO judges and CPS are unaware of their authority to certify or do not want to sign.*

Administrative Delays and Lack of Clear Policy:

- Administrative delays in the certification process. (1-year wait for a police report)
- Absence of a process in place for certification or the agency is unaware of the policy.*

- Confusion about who should sign the certifications.*
- Agencies have additional requirements that were not intended by Congress.*
- Police would not certify if there were an open prosecution.

Authority and Superior Approval:

- Some agencies require approval from superiors or higher authorities before signing certifications. (Maryland State Police needs to request the Attorney's General authorization).
- Agencies or officials referring applicants to other agencies specializing in U visas.

Specific Case Circumstances:

- Lack of evidence or helpfulness, especially in cases where the criminal incident occurred many years ago.
- Police reports that were not thorough.

3. **What are some common reasons you have experienced that agencies did not sign a T visa certification? Write N/A if this does not apply to you.***

Similar to the reasons for not signing U visa certifications, the reasons for agencies not signing T visa certifications vary from administrative and knowledge-related issues to specific case circumstances and belief differences. There appears to be a need for more education and training on the T-visa certification process to ensure that eligible victims of human trafficking can access the benefits provided by Congress.

Lack of Understanding and Knowledge:

- Lack of a clear understanding of the T visa certification process.*
- Failure to read through the government guides issued by USCIS.
- Absence of a process in place for certification.
- Insufficient familiarity with identifying human trafficking situations, especially labor trafficking
- Lack of knowledge about the T visa.*

Administrative Delays and Lack of Clear Policy:

- Administrative delays in the certification process.
- Confusion about who should sign the certifications.*
- Additional requirements imposed by agencies that were not intended by Congress.*

Insufficient Training:

- Lack of education and training on the T-visa certification process.*

4. **Please feel free to share any additional relevant information regarding serving immigrant survivors.**

Education and Training for Certifiers:

- State and government agencies need a clear understanding of the distinctions between state and federal assistance for immigrant survivors.
- There is a need for comprehensive education and training on U and T visas at both local and state levels, particularly for agencies that may not recognize their role in assisting immigrant survivors, such as Child & Adult Protective Services and the Department of Labor.*
- Lack of trauma-informed training to assist survivors who have experienced trauma, mistreatment, or assault.
- **Suggestion:** A centralized resource listing all certifiers, their contact information, and policies could improve accessibility for survivors seeking certification.

Lack of Resources:

- Limited resources, including a lack of local pro bono immigration attorneys, can delay access to legal assistance.
- Lack of government resources dedicated to asylum seekers.
- Lack of services for Immigrant Population (Eastern Shore, Dorchester County)*
- Nonprofit agencies play a significant role in supporting immigrant survivors, waitlist for these organizations is long.

Other Barriers Preventing Access to Services:

- Some immigrant survivors may not access services due to immigration status and cultural barriers.*
- Administrative delays and scheduling difficulties with government agencies disproportionately affect immigrant communities.
    - For instance, MVA runs additional verification with USCIS for asylees and Refugees that can take 2+ weeks. They do not call when verification is complete.
- Immigrants lack of understanding of their rights.*
- Language barriers.
- Interpretation services are not readily available when calling hotlines or visiting government offices.

Specific Challenges for Latina and Immigrant Victims:

- Latina victims face unique challenges in obtaining help with hotline domestic violence programs, including issues related to the Danger Assessment tool and a lack of culturally sensitive support.
- Victim assistants at the State Attorney's Office have limitations in providing comprehensive services, particularly for immigrant victims.