

May 14, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As leaders of the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander community, we write to express deep concern about H.R. 4970, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2012 (VAWA) (Adams, R-FL), as amended, because it seriously erodes protections available to vulnerable immigrant victims of domestic violence.

Enacted in 1994 and reauthorized twice in 2000 and 2005, VAWA has a long history of uniting lawmakers with the common purpose of protecting all survivors of domestic violence. When VAWA was first conceived, Congress recognized that the noncitizen status of battered immigrants can make them particularly vulnerable to crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The abusers of undocumented immigrants often exploit victims' immigration status, leaving victims afraid to seek services or report the abuse to law enforcement and making them fearful of assisting with the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. Congress sought to address this through the enactment of provisions in VAWA that enhance safety for victims and their children and provide an important tool for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes. With each reauthorization of VAWA, Congress has recognized the importance of addressing and ensuring protections for noncitizen victims.

H.R. 4970 not only leaves out important improvements to VAWA's protections for immigrant survivors that were included in S. 1925 (Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2011) (Leahy, D-VT), the widely supported bipartisan Senate bill, but H.R. 4970 includes amendments that dramatically undermine existing protections for immigrant survivors in VAWA. H.R. 4970 would make current law far worse for victims by, for example, eroding important confidentiality protections and creating extra hurdles for victims to jump through in order to establish eligibility for lawful status.

The Asian American and Pacific Islander community strongly supports a robust VAWA that protects all women, including immigrant women. According to the most recent Census data, more than 5 million Asian American women are immigrants. Immigrant women may remain in abusive relationships because their immigration status is tied to a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident spouse. All women, children and others who fall victim to domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking are made safer by the important programs created under VAWA. America as a whole is made safer when all people, regardless of immigration or citizenship status, come forward to report crimes and cooperate with law enforcement.

We are deeply concerned that H.R. 4970 will roll back VAWA's protections and unnecessarily jeopardize

the lives of hundreds of vulnerable women, children and others. Because of our concerns, we urge you to reject H.R. 4970.

Sincerely,

Asian American Institute (AAI), Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian Law Caucus (ALC), Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Counselors Helping (South) Asians/Indians, Inc. (CHAI)
Hmong National Development, Inc.
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center (KRCC), Chicago
Korean-American Women In Need (KAN-WIN)
Korean Resource Center (KRC), Los Angeles
MAITRI
Mai Family Services
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse (NAPAFASA)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
Sneha
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)