

Testimony in support of S1305/H3269 An Act relative to Enforcing Federal Law
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Thank you Chairpersons Moore and Naughton & the Committee on Homeland Security for this opportunity today to speak in support of the Safe Communities Act.

My name is Debra Robbin and I am the Executive Director at Jane Doe Inc, the MA Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence. I am here today to speak on behalf of our 56 member programs that support immigrant survivors every day in the Commonwealth.

Sexual and Domestic violence occurs in our communities at incredibly high rates— Nearly 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men in MA have experienced rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. Survivors for a variety of reasons may not report these incidents nor may they have the ability to access supports and services that they many want or need.

For immigrant survivors, the barriers are even greater. Some may be isolated from services and supports because of language barriers and lack of available culturally relevant services. For many survivors, calling law enforcement may be the only way to interrupt or prevent future violence. Policies that blur the lines between immigration enforcement and community law enforcement endanger the safety of victims of sexual and domestic violence, their families, and communities. Immigrant survivors' access to justice is blocked when they cannot safely contact community law enforcement without the very real possibility of removal—and thus separation from families and communities--because of their immigration status. This also emboldens abusers who may use documentation status as a threat and the impact of unchecked violence has dire consequences.

The federal government (through VAWA) has recognized the unique status and vulnerability of immigrant victims of crime. Since 2005, Congress has encouraged

immigrant victims to report crimes without fear of the deportation. U-Visas and T-Visas were created for victims of violent crime and trafficking so that immigrants who were crime victims could safely cooperate with law enforcement investigations. These established legal protections have saved lives.

The current climate--stirred by Executive orders, an increase in ICE activity and anticipated local law enforcement collaboration with ICE—is already having a chilling effect on sexual and domestic violence survivors. JDI member programs tell us that survivors they are working with are truly afraid to contact law enforcement because of what they are hearing and seeing happen to others around them. Without access to safety and supports, individuals and families experience greater harm and trauma resulting in a decline in health and well-being. For the public health and safety of this commonwealth, we need to enact the provisions of the Safe Communities act and direct resources that provide real support and services toward improving the safety and dignity of all members of our Commonwealth.

JDI and our members ask that you report the Safe Communities Act favorably out of this committee.