



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | July 17, 2017

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UPDATE: ICE REMOVES PROTECTED NAMES FROM PUBLIC DATABASE AND PLEDGES TO SAFEGUARD DATA IN THE FUTURE

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) bureau of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shared in a [July 14, 2017 letter](#) that it has removed from its publicly searchable database all federally protected information of immigrant victims of crime. In the letter, ICE states that it “takes very seriously both its mission to promote public safety and its obligations to safeguard crime victims.”

This letter comes after advocates found that identifying information about victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and other crimes was publicly searchable in a new database launched by ICE in late April 2017. The Tahirih Justice Center informed ICE Acting Director Thomas Homan about the violation by letters dated May 12 and [May 25](#), and requested that ICE immediately remove all confidential information from the database. Although it took several weeks, during which time the database remained fully available, ICE finally removed the protected information.

Under federal law, DHS is prohibited from disclosing any information about a survivor of violence seeking protection under the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 or the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. These confidentiality provisions are essential, since perpetrators may try to locate and harm victims, undermine and interfere with their cases in order to maintain power and control, or jeopardize victims’ eligibility for relief.

Yet, when first released, the new Victim Information and Notification Exchange (DHS-VINE) contained the names, country of citizenship, age, locations, and other protected information about these immigrant victims of crime. This database is not only publicly searchable, but also allows any member of the public to receive notifications about the whereabouts of all immigrant detainees, including victims of crime and those who are simply undocumented. This put victims in detention at great risk. After notification from advocates, ICE eventually took steps to remove this federally protected information about victims from this VINE database.

Advocates at Tahirih, ASISTA, API-GBV, and Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network will continue to vigorously pursue the rights and safety of immigrant victims of crime, including those in ICE custody.

Tahirih is grateful to the law firm Jenner and Block, LLP for its pro bono legal representation in this matter.

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The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, multi-city organization providing both policy advocacy and leadership and direct, on the ground legal services to immigrant and refugee women and girls fleeing violence. Tahirih will continue to monitor policy shifts that impact women and girls fleeing violence and advocate for the U.S. to honor its legal obligations to protect those fleeing human rights abuses. Contact Archi Pyati, Chief of Policy and Programs, at archip@tahirih.org for comment from Tahirih on this topic.

ASISTA is a national organization that provides leadership, advocacy, training, and technical assistance to those working with crime survivors seeking secure immigration status, especially those who have suffered gender-based violence. Contact Cecelia Friedman Levin, Senior Policy Counsel, at cecelia@asistahelp.org for comment from ASISTA on this topic.

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (formerly, Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence) is a national resource center on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian and Pacific



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Islander and immigrant communities. The Institute serves a national network of advocates and community-based service programs that work with Asian and Pacific Islander and immigrant survivors, and is a leader on providing analysis and advocacy on critical issues facing victims in the Asian and Pacific Islander and immigrant communities. Contact Grace Huang, Policy Director, at ghuang@api-gbv.org for comment from API-GBV on this topic.

Casa de Esperanza provides emergency shelter for women and children experiencing domestic violence and runs the National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities, which is a national institute focused on research, training & technical assistance, and policy advocacy focused on addressing and preventing domestic violence in Latino communities. Contact Rosie Hidalgo, Senior Director of Public Policy, at rhidalgo@casadeesperanza.org for comment from Casa de Esperanza on this topic.