

The Provision of Domestic Violence Services to Immigrants

Presentation to the City of Austin Commission on Immigrant Affairs

by Sandra Rangel, SafePlace

About Safeplace:

- SafePlace offers 24-hour crisis phone support, 512.267.SAFE (7233). The hotline provides access to our emergency shelter, safety planning, and provides referrals to community resources.
- Hospital accompaniment for sexual assault survivors is also coordinated through the hotline.
- The emergency shelter has 105 beds & provides an array of support services including case management, counseling and children's services.
- In shelter about 10-15 % of clients are immigrants. Have clients from 7 different countries. For example; Honduras, Mexico, Russia, Philippines, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone, Africa. 5 different languages. For Example: Tigrinya, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic

1. What barriers does Safeplace encounter in the provision of services to immigrants?

- Language barriers
- Permanent Housing is less accessible and difficult if they have a disability.
- Employment access
- Child Care
- Mental Health Care.

2. How could the City/Commission help you?

- To develop housing programs that are accessible. Clients have to live in houses that are in poor conditions. Clients do not report substandard housing because they are afraid.
- Child care: to increase access and programs

3. What are some items or aspects of this issue as it pertains to immigrants the City should keep in mind as it looks forward, particularly in light of immigration reform?

When the police are conducting an investigation they often come to believe that the client does not want to collaborate. This is not true. The victim wants to collaborate with the police, but they are afraid for themselves and their children because they believe

- The abuser will kill the victim due to threats the victim has received.
- The police has the power to send the victim back to their country of origin
- The police will not believe them and put them in jail if they talk.
- Their children will be removed by Child Protective Services and placed in foster care.

Thus we would like for police officers to receive more/better training on the dynamics of domestic violence. The purpose of this is for officers to understand the victim's frame of mind and why he or she cannot press charges against his or her abuser or "collaborate with the police". This part is crucial because an undocumented immigrant victim of domestic violence, who does not cooperate with law enforcement, is ineligible for one of the visas that are available: VAWA (Violence against Women Act) Visa and U Visa. We need for law officers to be more sensitive in order to not delay verifying that the victim is a victim of domestic violence. This will not only help immigrant victims become documented in the United States, but also provide them access to a safer and better life.