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News

Press Releases: *U Visa Regulations Released*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 5, 2007

LEGAL MOMENTUM APPLAUDS THE RELEASE OF U VISA REGULATIONS
Thousands of Crime Victims Finally Receive the Protections of a Law Passed in 2000

Documents:

U Visa Supplemental B Fact sheet

U Visa Interim Regulations Fact Sheet and Guidance

U Visa Regulations Fact Sheet

VAWA Red Flags

Washington DC (September 5, 2007)-- Legal Momentum, the nation's oldest legal advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls, joins with immigrant rights advocates across the country to applaud the Department of Homeland Security's release of interim regulations on the U visa, a remedy established by Congressional legislation enacted in 2000. The Department of Homeland Security today released the regulations thus making immigrant crime victims immediately eligible for the U visa. Legal Momentum, through its Immigrant Women Program in Washington DC, is committed to working with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that the regulations are aligned with Congressional intent while providing immediate access to visas for immigrants crime victims. The Legal Momentum Web site is a portal for information and will provide critical resources for those who may be eligible to file for U visas: www.legalmomentum.org/iwp.

Through its Immigrant Women Program (IWP), and in partnership with the National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women, Legal Momentum has been advocating for release of these vital regulations to protect the rights of immigrant women who are victims of crime in the United States and who, without the protection of the U visa, are less likely to report the crimes against them. Legal Momentum commends Congressman David Pryce (D-NC) and Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) who were instrumental in encouraging the Department of Homeland Security to release the regulations.

What is the U Visa and why does it matter?

Created as part of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act, the U visa is an immigration status available to crime victims who are helpful in the investigation or prosecution of a crime. In order to qualify, an undocumented immigrant must also prove that he or she suffered from physical or mental abuse as a result of the crime. U visas also create a path to lawful permanent residence, which is commonly known as a Green Card. This visa will allow undocumented immigrants to feel safer in coming forward to report and testify about crimes because they will no longer fear deportation, and they will be able to work lawfully. It will improve the effectiveness of law enforcement in investigating and prosecuting crimes, enhancing public safety throughout the country.

Although Congress passed a law in 2000 that recognizes the role immigrants can play in improving public safety, that law has not been enforceable, until now, in the absence of

regulations to implement the visa. Leslye Orloff, director of Legal Momentum's Immigrant Women Program, said, "These regulations make it possible for our most vulnerable immigrants to finally have the opportunity to apply for a status that should have been available years ago." She added, "Without regulations, thousands of immigrants were at best allowed to apply for U visa interim relief, which granted them authorization to work legally, but still kept them undocumented."

The Immigrant Women Program estimates that 8,000 immigrants and their children have applied for and received interim relief, but many more waited for the regulations. In addition to keeping thousands of crime victims from reporting the crimes, this seven-year delay imposed huge burdens on eligible immigrants who would have, by now, received their Green Cards. In addition, they were prevented from leaving the United States to see family and receiving critical benefits, they were required to pay annual filing fees to renew work authorization.

In an effort to reinforce Congressional intent in enacting this legislation, Legal Momentum's Immigrant Women Program has been at the forefront of the battle to end the long delay by the Department of Homeland Security in issuing proposed regulations. Said Kavitha Sreeharsha, staff attorney for the Immigrant Women Program, "We wanted the Department of Homeland Security to understand that immigrant crime victims have been struggling while waiting for the regulations to be issued. Immigrant crime victims do not deserve to be victimized by such bureaucratic delays." Members of the National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women were critical in providing the Department of Homeland Security and others with stories of immigrants who have been caught in the cycle of waiting for regulations.

About Legal Momentum

With offices in New York City and Washington DC, Legal Momentum is the nation's oldest legal advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls. Since its founding in 1970, Legal Momentum has been a leader in establishing legal, legislative and educational strategies to secure equality and justice for women across the country. Its public policy and litigation agenda focus on four areas that are of greatest concern to women in the United States: freedom from violence against women, equal work and equal pay; the health of women and girls; and strong families and strong communities.

About Immigrant Women Program

The Immigrant Women Program at Legal Momentum advocates for legal protections, social services and economic justice for immigrant women while reforming laws, policies and practices that may harm them.

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