

March 13, 2015

Dear Senator:

The National Women's Law Center urges you to vote in support of the Leahy Comprehensive Substitute Amendment to the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (S. 178). Since 1972, the National Women's Law Center has worked to protect and advance the progress of women and their families in core aspects of their lives, with an emphasis on the needs of low-income women.

The Leahy Substitute improves upon the current version of the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) in several ways that are critical for women and girls -- including removing a harmful provision that would deny women who were trafficked the reproductive health care they may need.

Under the abortion restriction that is included in the current version of the JVTA, trafficking survivors would be denied access to comprehensive health services. Women emerging from such detrimental exploitation need compassionate care and the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion. The inclusion of this provision in the bill harms women and it must be removed.

The Leahy Substitute also includes two additional pieces of proposed legislation, Senator Leahy's Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (S. 262) and Senator Klobuchar's Stop Exploitation Through Trafficking Act of 2015 (S. 166). Bringing together all three of these bills, the Leahy Substitute provides even greater tools for combatting trafficking in persons and to support those who have been trafficked.

Finally, we urge you to oppose any amendments to the JVTA that would impose further harm on women who have been trafficked. For example, the Vitter amendment seeks to place restrictions on the plain and unequivocal language of the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment. His amendment would create two tiers of citizenship with potentially millions of natural-born Americans being treated as somehow less than entitled to the equal protection of the laws that our nation has struggled so hard to guarantee. This amendment stands in direct opposition to the most fundamental of American principles -- the equal treatment under the law of all citizens—and enforcement of this amendment would inevitably lead to harassment of pregnant immigrant women and pregnant women of color.

Your support of the Leahy Substitute, and opposition to dangerous amendments like the Vitter Amendment, is critical. The Senate must pass a bill that helps, rather than harms, women.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gretchen Borchelt". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Gretchen Borchelt  
Acting Vice President, Health and Reproductive Rights  
National Women's Law Center