How NOT to Commemorate National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, April 8-14, 2018

SF 481 anti-immigrant law and Marsy’s Law undermine efforts to serve ALL victims

DES MOINES, Iowa – April 12, 2018 – Thanks to a proclamation signed by Governor Kim Reynolds, Iowa joined communities nationwide commemorating National Crime Victims’ Rights Week (NCVRW), April 8-14, 2018. This year’s theme, Expand the Circle: Reach All Victims, emphasizes the importance of inclusion and the need to “ensure that every crime victim has access to services and support.” Governor Reynolds’s NCVRW proclamation acknowledges that “serving all victims of crime is essential to thriving communities, yet there are still too many without meaningful access to rights and services,” and that “many face barriers – such as isolation, language limitations, distrust of the system, lack of transportation or cultural barriers – that keep them from accessing the services and systems that can help them recover.”

Indeed. The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) represents 21 agencies providing direct services in every Iowa county to victims of violent crimes. We couldn’t agree more with both the theme for NCVRW and concerns sited in Iowa’s well-intentioned proclamation. However, ICADV couldn’t be more disappointed that SF 481, a harmful anti-immigration bill was signed into law this week of all weeks, and that legislation known as “Marsy’s Law” (HJR 2010/SJR 2010) proposing an amendment to Iowa’s constitution establishing rights for crime victims may be considered soon. We believe these two proposals send the exact opposite message of inclusion to crime victims. ICADV member programs served more than 35,000 victims of domestic violence last year and employ service providers with several thousand years of combined experience assisting crime victims.

SF 481 was opposed by crime victim service providers and local law enforcement because it prioritizes immigration status over public safety and conflicts with constitutionally protected rights of the accused. ICADV believes SF 481 unnecessarily incites fear in Iowa’s immigrant communities and increases danger for all crime victims, especially immigrant victims of domestic and sexual violence. These victims face overwhelming challenges seeking assistance because abusive partners routinely exploit a partner’s immigration status as a tactic of abuse. Victims won’t call for help if they fear family/friends could be unjustly deported. Like law enforcement officials, victim service providers work to enhance safety by building relationships with community members and encouraging them to seek services when they are in danger. This proposal turns that on its head. The day the bill was signed several service providers reported that clients called to cancel appointments stating they didn’t feel safe seeking services.

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ICADV remains unwavering in our support for crime victims but we oppose Marsy’s Law because we believe a constitutional amendment is the wrong mechanism for effectively supporting victims and undermines systems and services that can better meet their comprehensive needs. Establishing constitutional rights without meaningful remedy or adequate funding for services gives false hope to victims and prioritizes the rights of victims who pursue remedy in the courtroom over the vast majority of victims who do not. Iowa law already includes comprehensive rights and protections for crime victims. **Instead of amending the constitution, let’s make current law work better for all crime victims and provide adequate funding for systems and services to ensure victims can access meaningful rights and services.**

The victim service providers we represent strive to support *all* crime victims every day. Please join us in “Expanding the Circle to Reach All Victims” so that no one in our state is afraid to call police or seek services and that pursuing real justice for crime victims moves beyond simply securing rights within the criminal justice system, i.e. that we serve crime victims who choose to stay in relationships as well as the vast majority of victims who cannot or will not find justice in the courtroom.

**About the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence**
The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) is a state level nonprofit organization representing 21 local programs that provide direct services to survivors of domestic violence. In 2017, ICADV’s network of member programs served more than 35,000 survivors—an 18% increase over 2016. The Coalition provides education, legal services, counseling, training and emergency housing resources to member programs, community groups, and public/private organizations. For more information, visit www.icadv.org or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/IowaCADV.