

No. 18-71455

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**IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT**

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**LORENIA GONZALEZ MATUS,  
Petitioner,**

**v.**

**WILLIAM P. BARR,  
Attorney General of the United States,  
Respondent.**

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**ON PETITION FOR REVIEW OF AN ORDER OF THE  
BOARD OF IMMIGRATION APPEALS  
Agency No. A#205-868-691**

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**MOTION FOR LEAVE TO FILE OUT-OF-TIME  
BRIEF FOR AMICI CURIAE AND  
BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE IN SUPPORT OF PETITIONER  
(Not Detained)**

Submitted By:

Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.  
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
5228 Whittier Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90022  
Telephone: (213) 640-3939  
Facsimile: (213) 640-3911  
Email: bgalvarez@lafla.org

**MOTION FOR LEAVE TO FILE OUT-OF-TIME**  
**BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE**

Proposed Amici respectfully move for leave to file the accompanying brief as Amici Curiae in support of petitioner out-of-time.

Amici are all organizations that work with immigrant survivors of crimes and are particularly concerned with the intersection of immigration and violence against women in the United States. Some Amici were involved in creating the U visa, and all work together to identify and address emerging barriers to safety and justice for immigrant survivors of domestic and sexual violence. In this brief, Amici endeavor to address issues raised by the pleadings without making redundant arguments, as well as offering a unique perspective on the issues raised by this case.

Amici became aware of this litigation late in its development, but began securing the resources necessary to provide this brief as soon as Amici became aware of the case. Amici hope this Court agrees that the perspective that Amici provides justifies accepting our late-filed brief. Amici respectfully move for leave to file the out-of-time accompanying brief in support of petitioner, urging this Court to grant the Petitioner's request.

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Dated: November 4, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

s/Brigit G. Alvarez

Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.  
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
5228 Whittier Blvd.  
Los Angeles, California 90022  
Telephone: (213) 640-3939  
Facsimile: (213) 640-3911  
Email: bgalvarez@lafla.org

s/Gail Pendleton

Gail Pendleton  
ASISTA Immigration Assistance  
P.O. Box 12  
Suffield, CT 06078  
Telephone: 860-758-0733  
Email: gail@asistahelp.org

Attorneys for Amici Curiae

## **CORPORATE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Pursuant to Fed. R. App. P. 26.1, Amici Curiae submit the following corporate disclosure statement:

Amici curiae are nonprofit corporations and/or programs of nonprofit corporations and have no other corporate parents. They are not publicly traded.

*s/Brigit G. Alvarez*  
Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.

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## **BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE**

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, ASISTA Immigration Assistance, National Network to End Domestic Violence, Freedom Network USA, and Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence respectfully submit this brief as Amici Curiae in support of Petitioner Ms. Lorena Gonzalez Matus (hereinafter “Petitioner” or “Ms. Gonzalez Matus”) urging that the Court grant the relief the Petitioner requested.

## **INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE**

Amici are nonprofit organizations that serve and advocate on behalf of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence. Based on their experience and expertise, Amici understand that immigrant survivors of violence often face a myriad of barriers seeking justice and protection from abuse. Amici have extensive knowledge about the legal protections for immigrant survivors contained in the 1994 Violence Against Women Act and its progeny, which Congress created to help address these barriers. These protections, including the “U” nonimmigrant visa (hereinafter “U visa”), encourage survivors to seek justice and help them gain independence and security. For immigrant survivors, meaningful access to these immigration protections is often the determining factor in whether they seek help, safety and justice. Survivors in removal proceedings rely on the immigration courts to provide meaningful access

to these critical protections through case law and procedures that ensures they are not deported before the United States Citizen and Immigration Services grants their applications for status.

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (hereinafter “LAFLA”) is California’s largest nonprofit law firm and has been protecting and advancing the rights of the most underserved for ninety (90) years. Every year, LAFLA helps more than 80,000 people in civil legal matters by providing direct legal representation and other legal assistance for low-income people across the greater Los Angeles region. LAFLA provides direct representation to indigent immigrants in removal proceedings as well as those applying for affirmative benefits. The immigration work at LAFLA focuses on those who are survivors of violent crime. LAFLA runs regular clinics for victims of crime, as well as weekly clinics for survivors of domestic violence throughout the greater Los Angeles area. LAFLA frequently works with immigrant clients who are petitioning for U visa status.

ASISTA worked with Congress to create and expand routes to secure immigration status for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes, which were incorporated in the 1994 Violence Against Women Act and its progeny. ASISTA serves as liaison for the field with Department of Homeland Security personnel charged with implementing these laws, most notably Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Customs Enforcement,

and Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. ASISTA trains and provides technical support to local law enforcement officials, civil and criminal court judges, domestic violence and sexual assault advocates, and legal services, non-profit, pro bono, and private attorneys working with immigrant crime survivors. ASISTA has previously filed amicus briefs to the Supreme Court and to the Second, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Circuits. *See United States v. Castleman*, 134 S. Ct. 1405 (2014); *State of Washington v. Trump*, No. 17-35105 (9th Circuit, March 17, 2017); *L.D.G. v. Holder*, 744 F.3d 1022 (7th Cir. 2014); *Torres-Tristan v. Holder*, 656 F.3d 653 (7th Cir. 2011); *Lopez-Birrueta v. Holder*, 633 F.3d 1211 (9th Cir. 2011); *Rosario v. Holder*, 627 F.3d 58 (2d Cir. 2010); *Sanchez v. Keisler*, 505 F.3d 641 (7th Cir. 2007).

The National Network to End Domestic Violence (hereinafter "NNEDV") is a not-for profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1994 to end domestic violence. As a network of the 56 state and territorial domestic violence and dual domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions and their over 2,000 member programs, NNEDV serves as the national voice of millions of women, children and men victimized by domestic violence, and their advocates. NNEDV was instrumental in promoting Congressional enactment and implementation of the Violence Against Women Acts. NNEDV works with federal, state and local policy makers and domestic violence advocates throughout

the nation to identify and promote policies and best practices to advance victim safety. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse and other gender-based crimes. NNEDV has a strong interest in ensuring that immigrant victims can report the crimes they experienced without fear that the disclosure will result in removal proceedings.

Freedom Network USA (hereinafter “FNUSA”) is the largest alliance of human trafficking advocates in the United States. Our 68 members include survivors of human trafficking and those who provide legal and social services to trafficking survivors in over 40 cities, providing comprehensive legal and social services, including representation in immigration cases. In total, our members serve over 2,000 trafficking survivors per year, including adults and minors, survivors of both sex and labor trafficking, over 65% of whom are foreign national survivors. FNUSA provides training and advocacy to increase understanding of the wide array of human trafficking cases in the US, including a Department of Justice grant to increase access to housing for human trafficking survivors. FNUSA has been involved in the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and has been a key advocate in each subsequent Reauthorization. While many trafficking survivors in the United States pursue T Visas, others pursue U Visas. FNUSA has an interest in ensuring that foreign national trafficking survivors are protected from removal while their U Visa is pending. Human trafficking is a pernicious crime.

Survivors have been isolated, threatened, abused, and exploited physically, emotionally, and financially. Traffickers take advantage of United States immigration law and policy to depress wages, harm workers, and distort the United States economy. The U Visa is a critical tool for both protecting survivors and supporting the prosecution of traffickers.

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (hereinafter “Institute”) is a national resource center on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The Institute serves a national network of advocates and community-based service programs that work with Asian and Pacific Islander survivors, and is a leader on providing analysis on critical issues facing victims in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The Institute leads by promoting culturally relevant intervention and prevention, expert consultation, technical assistance and training; conducting and disseminating critical research; and informing public policy. The Asian Pacific Institute’s vision of gender democracy drives its mission to strengthen advocacy, change systems, and prevent gender violence through community transformation.

Amici have a direct interest in this case because the result will affect future U visa applicants. Additionally, Amici have a direct interest in ensuring that noncitizens are not unduly prevented from pursuing motions to reopen.



## INTRODUCTION

Immigrant populations are particularly vulnerable to crimes such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking because, if they fear they will be deported for contacting law enforcement, they are unlikely to report domestic abuse and sexual assault. *See* Stacey Ivie et al., *Overcoming Fear and Building Trust with Immigrant Communities and Crime Victims*, Int'l Ass'n Of Chiefs Of Police (Apr. 2018), [http://library.niwap.org/wpcontent/uploads/PoliceChief\\_April-2018\\_Building-Trust-With-Immigrant-Victims.pdf](http://library.niwap.org/wpcontent/uploads/PoliceChief_April-2018_Building-Trust-With-Immigrant-Victims.pdf). One of the most intimidating tools of power and control abusers use is threatening to get their victims deported if they seek help. *Id.* Such threats help abusers “maintain control over their victims and . . . prevent them from reporting crimes to the police.” *Id.*

Congress created the U visa as part of a decades-long legislative effort to encourage immigrant crime victims to seek justice. Those efforts began with the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-322, tit. IV, 108 Stat. 1902 (Sept. 13, 1994). In 2000, Congress expanded the program to include additional crime victims under the U visa. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, § 1513, 114 Stat. 1464 (Oct. 28, 2000). The U visa offers a pathway to secure immigration status for victims of violent crimes who are helpful to law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution of their perpetrators. 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(U)(i).

Congress' clear intent in creating the U visa was to overcome noncitizen victim's fears that contacting law enforcement would result in their deportation. *See New Classification for Victims of Criminal Activity; Eligibility for "U" Nonimmigrant Status*, 72 Fed. Reg. 53,014 (2007). The Board of Immigration Appeals (hereinafter "BIA") decision in this case, *Gonzalez Matus v. Whitaker*, thwarts this Congressional goal and occurs at a time when the Department of Homeland Security (hereinafter "DHS") has launched numerous efforts to eviscerate U visa law without legislative approval. Whether intentionally or not, dismissing Ms. Gonzalez Matus's motion sends a message to both crime victims and United States law enforcement: Perpetrators may once again use our immigration courts as weapons against their victims.

Ms. Gonzalez Matus is exactly the kind of person Congress had in mind when it created the U visa. Amici ask this Court to stand firm against Executive efforts to eliminate, through practice and policy, the protections for crime survivors Congress created in the U visa. We respectfully request that this Court insist that the BIA reopen Ms. Gonzalez Matus's case and allow her to stay until the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (hereinafter "USCIS") decides the fate of her U visa application.

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## **SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT**

This Court should reverse the BIA's decision to deny the Petitioner's motion to reopen her removal proceedings so she may pursue her U visa application in the United States. Congress created the U visa to provide protection to noncitizen victims of violent crimes who may not otherwise report their perpetrators because they fear deportation if they do so. The laws enacting and expanding the U visa and the legislative history of those laws illustrate Congressional intent that U visa applicants remain in the United States while their U visa applications are pending.

Over the years since Congress created the U visa, USCIS and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (hereinafter "ICE"), have implemented several systems to ensure legitimate crime victims are not removed while awaiting decisions on their U visa cases. The BIA has adopted a similar framework to avoid removing crime victims in immigration proceedings. This court should repudiate the BIA's effort to avoid, through procedural sleight of hand, its responsibility for ensuring immigrant survivors of domestic violence are not removed while their cases are pending at USCIS.

## **ARGUMENT**

### **I. Congress Created the U Visa to Encourage Reporting by Those Who Fear Deportation If They Access Our Criminal System.**

In 1994, Congress enacted the watershed Violence Against Women Act of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-322, tit. IV, 108 Stat. 1902 (Sept. 13, 1994) (hereinafter

“VAWA 1994”) , representing our nation’s first systems-wide attempt to halt and address violence against all women in this country, including noncitizens.

VAWA 1994 provided a “self-petitioning” option for immigrants subjected to “battery or extreme cruelty” by a United States citizen or lawful permanent resident spouse or parent. VAWA 1994 at § 40701, *see* 8 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(1)(A)(ii) & (B)(ii). That law freed many immigrant domestic violence victims from the inherent power and control over immigration status abusive spouses otherwise possess in our family immigration system.

VAWA 1994 did not address, however, violence by those who were not in intimate relationships with lawful permanent residents or United States citizens. In 2000 Congress created the U visa to both help additional survivors of violent crimes find safety and to provide a tool for law enforcement to work with crime victims too afraid of deportation to report the crimes they experience. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No, 106-386, § 1513(a) (Oct. 28, 2000). Congress explicitly stated that it was creating the U visa to “facilitate the reporting of crimes to law enforcement officials by trafficked, exploited, victimized, and abused aliens who are not in lawful immigration status,” *id.* § 1315(a)(2)(B), and to “strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, investigate, and prosecute” serious crime. *Id.* § 1513(a)(2)(A).

“[P]roviding battered immigrant women and children who were experiencing domestic violence at home *with protection against deportation* . . . frees them to cooperate with law enforcement and prosecutors in criminal cases brought against their abusers.” Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No, 106-386, § 1502(a)(1)(2) (Oct. 28, 2000). (emphasis added). Congress enacted the Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act to cover victims whose “abusers are virtually immune from prosecution *because their victims can be deported* as a result of action by their abusers and the Immigration and Naturalization Service cannot offer them protection no matter how compelling their case under existing law.” *Id.* § 1502(a)(1)(3). (emphasis added). Congress recognized that “immigrant women and children are often targeted to be victims of crimes committed against them in the United States.” *Id.* § 1513(a)(1)(A).

The legislative history accompanying the bill also demonstrates that Congress intended to alleviate the barriers that immigrant victims of violent crimes face and specifically address the fear of deportation that prevents many from reporting abuse. Senator Patrick Leahy explained that the U visa “ma[d]e it easier for abused women and their children to become lawful permanent residents” and ensured that “battered immigrant women should not have to choose to stay with their abusers in order to stay in the United States.” 146 Cong. Rec. S10185 (2000)

(statement of Sen. Patrick Leahy). Senator Paul Sarbanes stated that this expansion of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 “will also make it easier for battered immigrant women to leave their abusers *without fear of deportation.*” 146 Cong. Rec. S8571 (2000) (statement of Sen. Paul Sarbanes) (emphasis added); *see also* 146 Cong. Rec. H8094 (2000) (statement of Rep. John Conyers) (“There are still demographic groups that need better access to services and the criminal justice system. Predominantly among them are people who have not had their immigrant status resolved and are not yet citizens but are subject to lots of unnecessary violence.”). More recently, during the debate on the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, Senator Amy Klobuchar described the importance of the U visa program from a former prosecutor’s perspective, recounting several cases where the perpetrator threatened to deport the immigrant victim if the victim came forward to law enforcement. 159 Cong. Rec. S497, 498 (2013).

The intent of Congress is clear: Immigrants who have been victimized in the United States should be able to work with law enforcement without the threat of deportation.

A. DHS Adopts Regulations and Policies to Avoid U Visa Crime Survivor Removal.

DHS in multiple ways, has implemented a structure designed to deter U visa applicant removals. Under 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(c)(1)(i), ICE is authorized “to file, at the request of the alien petitioner, a joint motion to terminate proceedings without

prejudice with the immigration judge or BIA, whichever is appropriate, *while a petition for U nonimmigrant status is being adjudicated by USCIS.*” (emphasis added). Similarly, 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(c)(1)(ii) provides for stays of a final order of removal while a victim’s U visa application is being processed.

Because Congress limited the number of U visas that USCIS may allocate each year to 10,000, USCIS created a regulatory “waitlist” for U visa applicants who would receive a visa except for the 10,000 visas a year cap. 8 C.F.R. § 214.14(d)(2). USCIS grants deferred action and attendant work authorization to U-visa applicants on the waitlist. *Id.* USCIS explained that it created the wait list “to balance the statutorily imposed numerical cap against the dual goals of enhancing law enforcement’s ability to investigate and prosecute criminal activity and providing protection to alien victims of crime. . .” *New Classification for Victims of Criminal Activity; Eligibility for “U” Nonimmigrant Status*, 72 Fed. Reg. 53,014 at 53,027 (Sept. 17, 2007).

In 2009, ICE issued two memoranda establishing a system in which it seeks a “prima facie determination” from USCIS for U visa applicants seeking stays, release from detention or relief in removal proceedings. *Guidance: Adjudicating Stay Requests Filed by U Nonimmigrant Status (U-visas) Applicants*, United States Dep’t Of Homeland Security, Immigr. and Customs Enforcement (Sept. 24, 2009), (available at <https://asistahelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ICE-Guidance->

Adjudicating-Stay-Request-Filed-by-U-Applicants.pdf); *Guidance Regarding U Nonimmigrant Status (U visa) Applicants in Removal Proceedings or with Final Orders of Deportation or Removal*, United States Dep't Of Homeland Security, Immigr. and Customs Enforcement (Sept. 25, 2009), (available at <https://asistahelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ICE-Memorandum-OPLA-Removal-Proceeding-or-with-Final-Orders-of-Deportation.pdf>).<sup>1</sup> The memorandum on U visa cases in proceedings states that, when an individual provides proof that they have filed a U visa petition, “the OCC [Office of Chief Counsel] *shall* request a continuance to allow USCIS to make a prima facie determination.” *Id.* at 2. The guidance further states that “[o]nce USCIS has determined that the alien has made a prima facie case, the OCC should consider administratively closing the case or seek to terminate proceedings pending final adjudication of the petition.” *Id.* It remains, moreover, the stated policy of ICE that in removal cases involving crime victims and witnesses, “ICE officers, special agents, and attorneys should exercise all appropriate prosecutorial discretion to

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<sup>1</sup> While ICE asserts, through an FAQ, that the stay guidance is no longer its policy, it has failed to either formally revoke that guidance, provide new guidance, or speak to the memorandum addressing U visa applicants in immigration proceedings. *See Revision of Stay of Removal Request Reviews for U Visa Petitioners*, United States Dep't Of Homeland Security, Immigr. and Customs Enforcement (Aug. 2, 2019), <https://www.ice.gov/factsheets/revision-stay-removal-request-reviews-u-visa-petitioners#wcm-survey-target-id>. This FAQ reveals that ICE either misunderstands or intends to undermine the Congressional goals of the law, since it blithely asserts that deporting U visa crime victims should harm neither the victim, nor law enforcement. Under its new “policy” created through FAQ, the thousands of U visa applicants waiting for USCIS to place them on the waitlist may be deported, making the U visa a false promise to both law enforcement and to crime victims.



*minimize any effect* that immigration enforcement may have on the willingness and ability of victims, witnesses, and plaintiffs to call police and pursue justice.”

*Prosecutorial Discretion: Certain Victims, Witnesses, and Plaintiffs*, United States Dep’t Of Homeland Security, Immigr. and Customs Enforcement (June. 17, 2011), <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/prosecutorial-discretion/certain-victims-witnesses-plaintiffs.pdf> (emphasis added).

**B. The BIA Articulated Its Own Prima Facie Protection for U Visa Applicants in Proceedings.**

In 2012, the BIA issued *Matter of Sanchez-Sosa*, 25 I.&N. Dec. 807 (BIA 2012) ensuring that crime victims seeking U visas would not be removed while USCIS determined the fate of their applications. The BIA held that in determining whether good cause exists to continue removal proceedings to await USCIS’s decision on a U visa applicant’s case, an immigration judge must consider the immigrant’s “prima facie eligibility for the U visa.” *Id.* at 813 n.7. For U visa applicants seeking a continuance, the BIA held that immigration judges should consider good faith factors including “(1) the DHS’s response to the motion; (2) whether the underlying visa petition is prima facie approvable; and (3) the reason for the continuance and other procedural factors.” *Id.* As a general rule, the BIA determined that a rebuttable presumption exists that an individual who has filed a prima facie approvable U visa application with USCIS will warrant a favorable exercise of discretion. *Id.* at 815.

Contrary to what DHS may argue, the BIA’s *Matter of L-A-B-R* decision is does not change the standard set out in *Sanchez-Sosa*. See *Matter of L-A-B-R*, 27 I. & N. Dec. 405,413,418 (A.G. 2018) (citing *Sanchez-Sosa* with approval). In fact, *L-A-B-R* states unequivocally that it is “consistent with Board precedents.” *Id.* at 418 (citing *Sanchez-Sosa*). Moreover, if ICE is dismantling the protective “prima facie” system it has used for a decade to ensure U visa applicants are not removed, it is more important than ever that the Executive Office for Immigration Review (hereinafter “EOIR”) and the BIA perform the function the Executive eschews: Enforcing the will of Congress. Deporting immigrant crime survivors, who all have certifications by law enforcement that they were helpful, seems designed to discourage immigrant crime victims from participating in our criminal justice system.

*i. The BIA Uses Motions to Reopen to Ensure the Integrity of Sanchez-Sosa.*

The BIA has applied *Sanchez-Sosa* to determine whether proceedings should be reopened based on a noncitizen application for a U visa or other relief before USCIS. For example, in *In re Peleayz*, No. AXXX XX4 106, 2017 WL 7660455 3, 3 (BIA Oct. 24, 2017), (available at <https://www.scribd.com/document/365695330/Augustine-Peleayz-A208-934-106-BIA>), the BIA cited *Sanchez-Sosa* in finding that reopening is warranted in light of “new and previously unavailable documentary evidence concerning the respondent’s application for nonimmigrant

U visa status.” Additionally, in *In re Y-A-L-L-*, AXXX XXX 594 2, 2 (BIA Oct. 29, 2015), (available at <https://www.scribd.com/document/290079091/Y-A-L-L-AXXX-XXX-594-BIA-Oct-29-2015>), about two months after the court ordered the respondent’s departure, the respondent filed a motion to reopen because of a now pending U visa. The BIA granted the respondent’s motion to reopen in light of the respondent “awaiting final adjudication of her application” for a U visa. *Id.*

There is no rational distinction between Ms. Gonzalez Matus’s case and the cases in which the BIA granted motions to reopen so that it could entertain a *Sanchez-Sosa* prima facie showing. Ms. Gonzalez Matus’s had “new and previously unavailable documentary evidence concerning the respondent’s application for nonimmigrant U visa status” and is now “awaiting final adjudication of her application.” *See In re Peleayz*, 2017 WL 7660455, at 3.

*ii. The U Visa Backlog Strengthens the Need for Sanchez-Sosa.*

Tens of thousands of U visa applicants are waiting to be put on the waitlist and, short of mandamus in federal court, have no control over the timing of that decision. *See Number of Form I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status, by Fiscal Year, Quarter, and Case Status 2009-2019* (Fiscal Year 2019, Quarter 2), United States Dep’t Of Homeland Security, Citizen and Immigr. Services (2019), [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/Victims/I918u\\_visastatistics\\_fy2019\\_qtr2](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/Victims/I918u_visastatistics_fy2019_qtr2).

pdf. As of October 2019, USCIS estimates it is taking more than *four years* (54 months) to process U visas. *See USCIS Processing Times*, Form: 1-918, Field Office or Service Center: VSC, United States Dep't Of Homeland Security, Citizen and Immigr. Services (last accessed October 25, 2019), <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times>. While the backlog illustrates the success of the U visa as a tool for law enforcement, USCIS's lengthy delay in placing U visa applicants on the waitlist leaves many crime victims languishing without legal work authorization and, under an apparent change in DHS policy, subject to deportation. Therefore, the extensive and growing U visa backlog is, if anything, an additional reason the BIA should insist that EOIR grant continuances to U visa applicants who make a prima facie showing. *See Matter of Alvarado-Turcio*, A201-109-166 2, 3 (BIA Aug 17, 2017) <https://www.scribd.com/document/360077591/Edgar-Marcelo-Alvarado-Turcio-A201-109-166-BIA-Aug-17-2017> (recognizing the significant U visa backlog and holding that "processing delays are insufficient, in themselves, to deny an alien's request for a continuance"); *see Malilia v. Holder*, 632 F.3d 598, 606 (9th Cir. 2011) (holding that "delays in the USCIS approval process are no reason to deny an otherwise reasonable continuance request."); *see Ahmed v. Holder*, 569 F.3d 1009, 1013 (9th Cir. 2009) (noting "concern about blaming a petitioner for an administrative agency's delay in processing an employment-based visa application").

If ICE dismantles its prima facie determination system for U visa applicants, and USCIS continues to inadequately staff and sluggishly process crime victim applications, EOIR will be the last safeguard against deporting thousands of crime victims who have been helpful to United States law enforcement.

## **II. The BIA Should Protect Immigrant Crime Survivors, Not Deport Them.**

The BIA must not shirk its duty to protect U visa applicants, either by refusing to apply its own *Sanchez-Sosa* prima facie analysis or through denying motions to reopen, such as Ms. Gonzalez Matus's. For the first time, USCIS is issuing notices to appear against U visa applicants, *Updated Guidance for the Referral of Cases and Issuance of Notices to Appear (NTAs) in Cases Involving Inadmissible and Deportable Aliens*, United States Dep't Of Homeland Security, Immigr. and Customs Enforcement (June 28, 2018), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Laws/Memoranda/2018/2018-06-28-PM-602-0050.1-Guidance-for-Referral-of-Cases-and-Issuance-of-NTA.pdf>. At the same time ICE is attempting to remove, instead of assist, U visa crime survivors. Elly Yu, *A Northern Virginia Mother Was A Victim Of Domestic Violence. She Was Deported*, Wamu 88.5 (Sept. 11, 2019) <https://wamu.org/story/19/09/11/a-northern-virginia-mother-was-a-victim-of-domestic-violence-she-was-deported>. Now more than ever, immigrant crime survivors and the law enforcement officers who work with

them, rely on the BIA and the federal courts to ensure the U visa law remains a vital tool for keeping our communities safe.

A. Protecting Survivors Against Deportation Encourages Crime Reporting.

In affirming the Immigration Judge's decision in this case, the BIA endorses an approach to crime victims that dismisses deportation as a serious consequence and ignores the will of Congress: because U visa applicants may pursue cases from abroad, deporting them does no harm. *See Certified Administrative Record 48.* This position reveals deep ignorance about the reality immigrant crime victims experience in this country and, whether intentional or not, threatens the integrity of the U visa system Congress created to encourage full participation in the U.S. criminal justice system.

The hazards of deportation are well-documented. The crime survivor loses financial stability, access to our civil and criminal justice systems, and the services she and her children need to escape and overcome domestic abuse. Instead, she and her family face possible violence, ostracization, and discrimination in their home country because they challenged male privilege. Moreover, many immigrants come from countries in which authorities are "brazenly corrupt" and "horrifyingly brutal." David A. Harris, *The War on Terror, Local Police, and Immigration Enforcement: A Curious Tale of Police Power in Post-9/11 America*, Bepress Legal Series (May 18, 2006), <https://law.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=>

6323&context=expresso. This is particularly true with enforcement of laws in the home country, if they exist, protecting women against domestic abuse and marital rape.

*i. Abuse and Violence Follow the Victim Home.*

In some cases, as in the Petitioner's, the abuser and victim are immigrants from the same country. When the immigrant abuser is prosecuted for their violent crime, they will likely be deported after serving their sentence. *See* 8 USC § 1227(a)(2)(E). Abusers also sometimes escape to their home country to avoid prosecution in the United States. A women's attempt to leave her abusive relationship was the "precipitating factor in 45 percent of the murders of a woman by a man." Carolyn R. Block, *Intimate Partner Homicide*, United States Dep't Of Just., 250 Nat'l Inst. of Just., 1, 6 (Nov. 2003), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000250.pdf>. Of abusers convicted on a misdemeanor domestic violence charge, thirty-one percent were arrested again within a year of being released and forty-four percent were arrested again within two years of being released; in both instances, the most common re-arrest was for felony assault. Nora K. Puffett, *Predictors of Program Outcome & Recidivism at the Bronx Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Court*, Center for Court Innovation (April 2004).

Survivors such as Ms. Gonzalez Matus may be left without protection in a country where the abuser is likely waiting to retaliate. The BIA has now given the

green light to Ms. Gonzalez Matus’s deportation to Mexico, where laws prohibit domestic violence, but do not criminalize spousal abuse. Mexico 2018 Human Rights Report, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 1, 24 (Mar. 13, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mexico>. Mexico’s laws “addressing domestic violence largely failed to meet the required federal standards and often were unenforced.” *Id.*

*ii. The Children of Abusive Homes Are Also Harmed.*

Many survivors consider their children when deciding whether to report abuse and risk deportation. Deportation leaves two possible outcomes for the survivor’s children, both of which place them at greater harm than remaining in the abusive relationship. The children may: (1) be separated from their mother and remain in the U.S., either with an abusive parent or in foster care, without her protection, or (2) be deported along with their mother to her home country to face tightened financial and physical risks. Michelle J. Anderson, *A License to Abuse: The Impacts of Conditional Status on Female Immigrants*, 102 YALE L.J. 1401, 21, 1427-28, fn. 127 (1993). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that in homes where violence between partners occurs, there is a thirty to sixty percent chance of co-occurring child abuse. Andrea Hazen. *Intimate Partner Violence Among Female Caregivers of Children Reported for Child Maltreatment*.



Child Abuse and Neglect, 30, 302,1–319 (March 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2003.09.016>. If survivors report abuse and are not offered protection from deportation, their physical safety and that of their children will be further compromised.

Deportation causes families “sudden and severe financial impact.”

Samantha Artiga, *Family Consequences of Detention/Deportation*, Kaiser Family Foundation (2018), <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/family-consequences-of-detention-deportation-effects-on-finances-health-and-well-being>. Many children have grown up in the United States and do not have strong connections to their countries of origin. These immigrants are often deported to homelessness. Amy F. Kimpel, *Coordinating Community Reintegration Services for “Deportable Alien” Defendants: A Moral and Financial Imperative*, 70 Fla. L. Rev. 1019, 1021 (2018).

### *iii. Survivors Are Already Discouraged from Reporting*

Prior to VAWA self-petitioning and the U visa, many crime survivors refrained from accessing justice. Undocumented immigrants, especially, under-reported crimes due to the fear they would be deported if they did so. Michael J. Wishnie, *Immigrants and the Right to Petition*, 78 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 667, 675 (2003). The law Congress created to protect undocumented immigrants gave them hope. Jacqueline P. Hand, *Shared Experiences, Divergent Outcomes: American Indian*

*and Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence*, 25 Wis. J. L. Gender & Soc’y 185, 203 (2010).

Unfortunately, in 2019 many immigrant crime survivors once again fear that, despite Congress’ repeated attempts to help them, reporting crimes will now result in their deportation and the deportation of their children. A 2017 survey of more than 800 advocates working with survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking revealed that forty-three percent of advocates had clients who dropped a civil or criminal case due to fear of immigration enforcement. *Promoting Access to Justice for Immigrant and Limited English Proficient Crime Victims in an Age of Increased Immigration Enforcement: Initial Report from a 2017 National Survey*, National Immigrant Women’s Advocacy Project, 1, 43 (May 3, 2018), <https://www.library.niwap.org/wp-content/uploads/Immigrant-Access-to-Justice-National-Report.pdf>. Forty-one percent of Latinos and Latinas reported that deportation is the primary reason why Latino and Latina survivors do not come forward. *The No Mas Study: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Latin@ Community*, Case De Esperanza (2015), <https://nomore.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/NO-MAS-STUDY-Embargoed-Until-4.21.15.pdf>

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B. The Fear of Deportation is Harming Law Enforcement Efforts to Keep Us All Safe

When immigrant crime victims fear accessing the U.S. criminal justice system, everyone suffers. Criminals target vulnerable populations such as immigrants. Pauline Pmiillo, *Undocumented Crime Victims: Unheard, Unnumbered, And Unprotected*, 20 Scholar 346, 354-55 (2018), <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=thescholar>. Gang members of criminal enterprises are strengthened by immigrant vulnerability to deportation because witnesses will not come forward. Dan Lieberman, *MS13 Members: Trump Makes the Gang Stronger*, CNN (July 28, 2017), <https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/28/us/ms-13-gang-long-island-trump/index.html>. Victim fear generated by deportations significantly fetters the ability of law enforcement to take dangerous criminals off the street. Meagan Flynn, *Houston's Chief Acevedo, Defiant and Introspective, Rails Against SB 4*, Houston Press (Apr. 28, 2017), <https://www.houstonpress.com/news/hpd-chief-acevedo-lambasted-sb4-in-defiant-candid-monologue-9394376>. Witnesses to crimes will no longer report. Lindsey Bever, *Hispanics "Are Going Further into the Shadows" Amid Chilling Immigration Debate, Police Say*, Wash. Post (May 12, 2017), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/05/12-immigration-debate-might-be-having-a-chilling-effect-on-crime-reporting-in->

hispanic-communities-police-say. When crime witnesses and victims are too afraid to speak out, we are all unsafe.

### **CONCLUSION**

Ms. Gonzalez Matus did exactly what Congress sought to accomplish with the U visa: she helped law enforcement authorities investigate and prosecute her abuser. Allowing the BIA to avoid, through procedural manipulation, it's responsibility under *Sanchez-Sosa* to protect Ms. Gonzalez Matus against removal reinforces the growing belief that the U visa program is an unreliable, false promise. Amici, immigrant survivors, and law enforcement who help them rely on this Court to help us ensure that the most fearful among us find the courage to challenge abuse, that reporting abuse does not get the reporter deported, and that crime perpetrators who prey on immigrants are held accountable. We ask this Court to halt our immigration system's drift towards becoming, once again, exactly what Congress sought to fix in the original VAWA of 1994: A weapon for abusers, rapists and other criminals to silence and control their victims. Amici respectfully request that this Court grant the relief requested by Petitioners.

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Dated: November 4, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

*s/Brigit G. Alvarez*

*s/Gail Pendleton*

Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.  
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
5228 Whittier Blvd.  
Los Angeles, California 90022  
Telephone: (213) 640-3939  
Facsimile: (213) 640-3911  
Email: bgalvarez@lafla.org

Gail Pendleton  
ASISTA Immigration Assistance  
P.O. Box 12  
Suffield, CT 06078  
Telephone: 860-758-0733  
Email: gail@asistahelp.org

Attorneys for Amici Curiae<sup>2</sup>

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*s/Brigit G. Alvarez*

Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Brigit G. Alvarez, the undersigned, hereby certify that November 4, 2019, I electronically filed the foregoing Motion for Leave to File Brief Out-of-Time Brief of *Amici Curiae* in Support of Petitioner by using the appellate CM/ECF system. All participants in the case are registered CM/ECF users and will be served by the appellate CM/ECF system.

Executed on this 4th of November 2019 at Los Angeles, California.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

*s/Brigit G. Alvarez*

Brigit G. Alvarez, Esq.  
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
5228 Whittier Blvd.  
Los Angeles, California 90022  
Telephone: (213) 640-3939  
Facsimile: (213) 640-3911  
Email: bgalvarez@lafla.org