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Well, hello there! What a pleasure it is to have you back on this page. If the tone I am using in this letter is already taking you aback, I would encourage you to read the [previous issue](#) to get a sense of what we are doing in this column. In this week's letter to you, I want to share how I was first introduced to this work, particularly as it ties in conveniently with the crash course for this week.

The summer before my senior year in high school, I had the opportunity to intern with a small law firm in Boston, Massachusetts. The months that followed were some of the most challenging and purpose-driven of my life. It was through the stories of those clients and the fellow advocates working around the clock to protect them that I first began to understand the intersection of legal systems, administrative policies, cultural identity, systemic barriers, and personal agency that defines the field of immigration law. In the field of victim advocacy, we often see the personal experiences of individuals intersect with the options we can offer. Immigration status and its bearing on the life and safety of victims of crime is the issue I want to scratch the surface of today.

Stick with me... This Might be Useful

Last Edition:

In my first edition of *This Might be Useful* you can expect...

- An introduction to myself, the blog, and the early worldview of a Buddhist Quaker
- A Crash Course on the Name of this column, and a shout out for the **Trevor Project**

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A Crash Course on Immigrant Survivors of Crime - T/U Visas

Now that we're off to the races with this column, given the current state of our country, I found it hard to write my second crash course on anything other than the unique challenges that immigrant victims of crime face. In an effort to make this information widely applicable and as useful as possible, I want to focus narrowly on an area of immigration law that directly affects this population: T Visas, U Visas, and the VAWA Self-Petition.

Many of us intuitively understand that public health and safety depend on everyone having the option to report to law enforcement when they have been harmed. When a significant portion of the population cannot safely report crime or abuse, the consequences are twofold. First, it denies survivors the recourse, protection, and support they deserve. Second, it poses a broader public safety risk, allowing individuals who cause harm to do so without accountability, and potentially continuing to harm others. The T/U non-immigrant visas were created by Congress under the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#) with bipartisan support to reduce these harms, assist law enforcement in their investigation of certain serious crimes, and to help ensure that survivors do not have to choose between deportation and safety. What am I actually talking about?

Here are the *current* benefits that these tools offer.

The **T Visa** is available to individuals who are survivors of human trafficking, including labor trafficking, sex trafficking, or both. To qualify, a person must demonstrate that they are a victim of a severe form of trafficking, that they are physically present in the U.S. on account of trafficking, and that they have complied with any reasonable request from law enforcement in investigating or prosecuting the crime (with exceptions for minors or survivors unable to cooperate due to trauma). If approved, T Visa holders receive temporary legal status, work authorization, and the ability to apply for permanent residency (a Green Card) after three years.

The **U Visa** applies to a broader range of serious crimes that happened in the United States, including domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and kidnapping, among others. To qualify, an individual must show that they suffered substantial physical or emotional abuse as a result of the crime, and that they were helpful, are being helpful, or are likely to be helpful to law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution. Like the T Visa, the U Visa provides temporary legal status and work authorization, with the possibility of applying for permanent residency later.

Violence Against Women Act (**VAWA**) **Self-Petition** allows for an abused spouse or child of a U.S. citizen or permanent resident to petition for status without the knowledge of their abuser. Where family might usually depend on the sponsorship of their U.S. citizen/permanent resident spouse or parent to get status in the U.S., a VAWA Petition allows for an abused individual to do so independently. Advocates should, of course, always connect survivors with specialized legal organizations such as the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC), which is [a terrific guide](#) to support advocates working on VAWA cases.

I am sorry to say that here, I must add a caveat to all of this good news and progressive legislation. These protections are far from perfect. T and U Visa applicants face years-long backlogs, during which survivors often live in legal limbo. The annual cap on U Visas—set at 10,000—has not been updated since the program’s creation, despite growing need. Most survivors are also required to engage with law enforcement, a condition that fails to account for the fear, mistrust, and systemic barriers many face when deciding whether to come forward. While far from perfect, these forms of relief remain essential tools for both individual and broader public safety.

These forms of humanitarian relief represent some of the only legal pathways available to immigrant survivors of serious crimes—individuals who have experienced significant harm and, in many cases, have already demonstrated extraordinary courage by cooperating with law enforcement under difficult and often dangerous circumstances. Efforts to end, discredit, or strip protections from T and U Visa holders do not serve anyone. Undermining these pathways not only retraumatizes survivors but also discourages future reporting, erodes community trust, and allows cycles of violence to continue. These legal protections exist because Congress recognized the need for them and unless Congress decides otherwise, they must be respected, upheld, and left intact.

Happy Pride Month, Everyone. I hope this was useful.

A Resource for the Road



RESOURCE FOR THE ROAD: ALLIANCE FOR IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS

If there is any organization or coalition that is truly meeting the moment and the needs of the people it represents, it is the [Alliance for Immigrant Survivors](#). Co-Chaired by The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, ASISTA Immigration Assistance, Esperanza United, and Tahirih Justice Center, this organization's work on policy guidance, rapid response, resource aggregation, and powerful storytelling, which has left a mark on the entire field. On a personal note, the Tahirih Justice Center is one of the primary reasons I discovered the work being done to add gender as a basis for asylum – they truly changed my life.

Over the spring, AIS conducted a [survey](#) of advocates and survivors to work to determine the impact that increased immigration enforcement has had on survivors' ability to access help. If you're looking for a way to learn more or ensure your own work is informed by the realities immigrant survivors face, AIS is a resource worth bookmarking.