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Alan Hanson
Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs
Alan.R.Hanson@ojp.usdoj.gov

Darlene Hutchinson Biehl
Director, Office for Victims of Crime
Darlene.L.Hutchinson@ojp.usdoj.gov

VIA EMAIL

RE: FY 2018 TVPA Human Trafficking Funding Restriction

AAG Hanson and Director Hutchinson Biehl:

We, the undersigned national, state-wide and local programs, and individuals from across the country, working to support survivors of human trafficking in the US and their allies, write to register our concern with OVC’s new restriction on using Trafficking Victims’ Protection Act funds for vacatur and expungement representation. Far too often, trafficking survivors are trapped by the criminal histories that resulted from their victimization, as well as the force, fraud and coercion exerted by the trafficker. Vacatur and expungement are, therefore, critical to the recovery and growth of survivors. Addressing this legal need with high-quality representation and training is a central component of a victim-centered comprehensive service response. We **strongly urge you to immediately remove this restriction from all FY18 funding.**

**Vacatur and Expungement are Critical to Survivor Success**
Criminal records impede a survivor’s ability to build a safe and independent life for themselves and their families. Criminal records are a barrier to federal financial assistance for higher education, employment with government agencies, housing programs, and more. Private employers and landlords often conduct background checks and deny employment and housing based on criminal histories. Survivors with criminal histories are forced to re-live their trauma, experience shame, and fear public embarrassment. **Vacatur and expungement allow justice systems to correct the record, and to recognize these individuals as survivors, not perpetrators, of a crime.**

**The TVPA Encourages Expansion of Vacatur**
The law does not require, or even suggest, this restriction. In fact, the TVPA explicitly provides that victims “should not be inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.” 22 U.S.C. § 7101(19). **That funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, or other government agencies, would be restricted to exclude vacatur and expungement represents a complete misalignment with U.S. law and practice as it has developed over the last decade.**
Legal Representation is Critical
Post-conviction relief for trafficking survivors has grown by virtue of truly multi-disciplinary collaboration between law enforcement, prosecuting agencies, lawmakers, legal and social service providers, and survivor leaders. When survivors are represented, their eligibility for vacatur and/or expungement is well analyzed and their motions are well-prepared and documented. Survivors often have multiple charges from multiple jurisdictions. Alone, it is difficult, if not impossible, for survivors to collect the necessary documentation of the criminal records, the context of the arrest, and evidence of their victimization. **With representation, motions are clearly presented and, therefore, much easier for prosecutors to review and respond to. They take fewer judicial resources, and are more likely to end in a just result.**

These restrictions would create a dangerous, and troubling, gap in services for victims. We are confident this problematic provision was included as a result of a simple oversight, not a deliberate decision to undermine trafficking victims’ ability to exit dangerous abuse and exploitation. **We trust that you will take immediate steps to remove this funding restriction.**

To discuss this matter further, please contact Jean Bruggeman, Executive Director of Freedom Network USA, at jean@freedomnetworkusa.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations
Advocating Opportunity
ASISTA Immigration Assistance
Change a Path
End Violence Against Women International
First House of Commandment
Freedom Network USA
Futures Without Violence
Gallerani Consulting Group, LLC
Give Way to Freedom
Global Labor Justice
HEAL Trafficking
Human Trafficking Justice Project
Jobs With Justice
Justice in Motion
Justice Restoration Center/West Florida Center for Trafficking Advocacy, Inc.
Life 107 Ministries
Modern Slavery Research Project
Moore & Van Allen PLLC
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Survivors Network
Reframe Health and Justice  
Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) Behind Bars  
Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center  
Shared Hope International  
Sharmus Outlaw Advocacy and Rights Institute (SOAR)  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
The A21 Campaign  
The Human Trafficking Legal Center  
The National LGBTQ Institute on IPV  
The SOAP Project - Theresa Flores  

State-wide Organizations  
ALIGHT (Alliance to Lead Impact in Global Human Trafficking)  
Amani Community Services  
Amara Legal Center  
Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles  
Catholic Charities of Baltimore - Esperanza Center  
Center for the Human Rights of Children, Loyola University Chicago  
Children's Advocacy Alliance (NV)  
Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST)  
Coast Consulting  
Community Legal Aid Society Inc.  
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants  
Council for Court Excellence  
End Domestic Abuse WI  
Family Violence Prevention, Inc.  
Florida Council Against Sexual Violence  
Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault  
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV)  
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Iowa Coalition For Collective Change  
Iowa Safe Schools  
Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs  
Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking  
Lexington Center for Recovery  
LOTUS Legal Clinic  
Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault  
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Michigan Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence  
Montana Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence  
National Council of Jewish Women Florida  
Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual & Domestic Violence  
New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault
People Against Trafficking Humans (PATH) Coalition of Kentucky
Safe Horizon
Street's Hope
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault
The Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law
The Women's Center, DreamCatcher Program
University of Baltimore Civil Advocacy Clinic
Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Vida Legal Assistance Inc.
Volunteer Lawyers for Justice
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Women's Fund of Omaha
Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Zoe Ministries Inc.

Local Organizations
Abuse & Rape Crisis Shelter of Warren County Ohio
Advocacy Partners Team, Inc.
American Gateways
API Chaya
API Chaya
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach
Ayuda
Back On Track Massage Therapy
Central Virginia Justice Initiative
Circle
Clarina Howard Nichols Center Inc
Cleveland Rape Crisis Center
Collective Action for Safe Spaces
Cornerstones of Care
Crime Victim Services
Crisis Intervention Services
ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project
ENC Stop Human Trafficking Now
FAIR Girls
Family Crisis Center, Inc.
Free to Thrive
HIPS
HOPE Works
Human Trafficking Collaborative Network (HTCN)
International Institute of Buffalo
Jessica Fitzwater, Frederick County Council
Justice At Last, Inc.
Latinas Unidas Por Un Nuevo Amanecer (L.U.N.A.)
Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada
Legal Aid society of Metropolitan Family Services
Lisa Ridenour Betty Griffin Center
MUJER, Inc.
My Sisters' Place
NewStory Center, Inc.
Ozark Rape Crisis, Inc.
Present Age Ministries
Project Against Violent Encounters
Project HELP, Inc.
Project Woman
Refuge House, Inc.
S.A.F.E.
Safeline, Inc.
Santa Clara County Wage Theft Coalition
Sexual Assault Crisis Team
Steps to End Domestic Violence
The Exploitation Intervention Project of The Legal Aid Society
The Lifeboat Project, Inc.
The Wild Hope Equine Center for Healing
Umbrella, Inc.
Verity
Victim Service Center of Central Florida
Voices Against Violence
WISE
Womankind
Women's Freedom Center
WomenSafe

Individuals
A. R. Myers
Abram Collard
Adina Gardner
Alex Burke
Alicia Peters
Alissa Stoehr
Alix R. Rubin, ESQ.
Amalia Schoone
Amanda Howell
Amelia Rubenstein
Amy Sharpe
Amy Watson
Angela C
Anna Maitland
Annie Isabel Fukushima, Ph.D.
Aylin Pillaca
Barb Reilly, RN

Barbara Amaya
Beth Barefoot
Brenda Nordstrom
Brent Woody
Brittani Stugart (Pryceless)
Caleb Stewart
Caroline Sennett
Carrie A. Bohnert, MPA, CHSE
Cathy Keenan
Chaka Batley
Charles M. Castillo
Chelsea Hamilton
Christian mendoza
Christina Wright
Christine Hanavan, MSW
Coletta Boone
D Thompson

Daniel Nieves
Deborah Pembrook
Diana DeSantis
Donna Hietpas
Doris
Dr. Jill McCracken
E danelek
Ed Cummings
Elissa E.
Eliza Reock
Elizabeth M. Landau, Esq.
Erica Anaya
Erika Gonzalez
Florrie Burke, FB
Consulting
Frances Recknor
Geoffrey N. Rosamond
Gunnar moller