



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 608
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute which provides direct legal services for survivors across the State of Maryland. We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 608.

Senate Bill 608 – Ensuring All Survivors Can Help Hold Offenders Accountable

Violent crime can affect anyone. Undocumented victims are often reluctant to report crimes due to fear of deportation. This fear allows perpetrators to remain free and continue harming others. The U Nonimmigrant Status Petition (U-Visa) serves as a critical tool to counteract this dynamic by allowing victims and their families to remain in the United States for up to four years to assist in the prosecution of crimes committed against them.

The U-Visa is available to those who are “helpful” in efforts to hold offenders accountable. Unfortunately, the U-Visa process currently lacks clarity regarding what qualifies as “helpful” assistance from victims and at what stage in the process that assistance must occur. As a result, law enforcement officers often find themselves making de facto immigration determinations rather than focusing solely on certification. This can lead to inconsistencies and unnecessary barriers for victims seeking justice. SB 608 provides essential clarification on the definition of “helpful,” ensuring a more straightforward process for both victims and law enforcement, ultimately leading to more effective investigations and prosecutions.

Additionally, Maryland's list of qualifying crimes for U-Visa eligibility does not currently align with federal guidelines. SB 608 addresses this discrepancy and will streamline the U-Visa process, particularly in cases where crimes span multiple states. SB 608 also expands the list of individuals authorized to certify that a crime occurred and that the victim has been helpful. By broadening certification authority, the bill ensures that victims have viable pathways to seek justice. Finally, SB 608 removes the statute of limitations for U-Visa petitions relative to the crime committed. This provision acknowledges the complex trauma that victims endure and grants them the necessary time to process their experiences and make the decision to report. This tracks more closely to Maryland's felony statute, which do not have a statute of limitations.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the
Judicial Proceedings Committee to
report favorably on Senate Bill 608**