



BILL NO: Senate Bill 553
TITLE: Victims and Witnesses - U Nonimmigrant Status - Certification of Victim Helpfulness
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 7, 2025
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the Committee to favorably Report on SB553.**

Bill 553 focuses on the certification process for U Nonimmigrant Status, commonly known as the U-Visa, which is designed to protect victims of certain crimes, including domestic violence, who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are willing to assist law enforcement in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity.

The U-Visa provides temporary legal status and work eligibility in the United States for up to four years, with the possibility of applying for permanent residency after meeting specific requirements. A critical component of the U visa application is obtaining a certification from a law enforcement agency or other designated authority confirming the applicant's helpfulness in the investigation or prosecution of the crime.

By streamlining and clarifying the certification process, SB 553 will make it more accessible for domestic violence survivors to obtain the necessary documentation for their U-Visa applications. Undocumented victims face unique challenges as they may fear deportation or retaliation if they come forward. Facilitating access to U-Visas encourages these individuals to report crimes and cooperate with law enforcement, thereby enhancing public safety and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. We also support SB 608, which may have a better approach.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on SB553.**

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