



BILL NO: House Bill 579
TITLE: Criminal Procedure - U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 27, 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 HB579.**

Undocumented victims of crime often hesitate to come forward due to fears of deportation. This reluctance allows perpetrators to go unpunished, enabling them to continue harming others. In cases where the victims of domestic violence or sexual assault are undocumented, we often see the perpetrators of abuse using their status to frighten the victim into silence. The U Nonimmigrant Status Petition (U-Visa) plays a crucial role in counteracting this issue by allowing victims and their families to stay in the U.S. for up to four years while assisting in the prosecution of their offenders. In order to be granted a U-Visa, the applicant must obtain a certification letter that they were “helpful” in the investigation and/or prosecution of the abuser.

Despite its significance, the U-Visa process remains unclear regarding what qualifies as “helpful” assistance from victims and when that assistance must take place. As a result, law enforcement officers who provide the letter often find themselves making immigration-related decisions rather than focusing strictly on certification. This lack of clarity leads to inconsistencies and unnecessary barriers for victims seeking justice. HB 579 provides much-needed guidance on the definition of “helpful,” simplifying the process for both victims and law enforcement and ultimately improving investigations and prosecutions.

Additionally, Maryland’s list of U-Visa-eligible crimes does not currently align with federal guidelines. HB 579 addresses this gap, which will help streamline the process, particularly in cases involving crimes that cross state lines.

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The bill also expands the range of individuals authorized to certify that a crime occurred and that the victim has been cooperative. Many undocumented victims have been conditioned to distrust law enforcement, making it difficult for them to report their experiences. By broadening certification authority, HB 579 ensures victims have more accessible pathways to seek justice, even in cases where law enforcement involvement is a barrier.

Finally, HB 579 removes the statute of limitations for U-Visa petitions related to the crime committed. This recognizes the profound trauma victims endure and gives them the necessary time to process their experiences before deciding to come forward.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on HB579.**