

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing 3/26/09  
Nilda Fernandez

**Committee Bill Number 6245, An Act Concerning The Recommendations of the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities.**

Good morning Senator McDonald and Representative Lawlor. My name is Nilda Fernandez and I am a student from the University of Connecticut School of Social Work Masters Program with a concentration in Public Policy.

I am testifying in support of committee bill number 6245, "An act concerning the recommendations of the Task Force on domestic violence in immigrant communities". This bill incorporates the recommendations of a Task Force that included experts in this field. Due to my own experience working with minorities and immigrants over the last eight years, I understand how prevalent this problem is in Connecticut and the consequences suffered by victims of abuse. For example, I work with an immigrant client who has for years suffered from domestic violence abuse and who just recently fled from her home in refuge because her partner was physically, verbally and emotionally abuse her. Consequently she lost temporary custody of her two-year old daughter because she was too afraid to seek speak up and seek professional help. She has been victimized and traumatized two-fold through the loss of her child and by the physical and emotional abuse. Having witnessed domestic violence as child, I fully understand firsthand how detrimental the consequences could be for those of us who are not considered privileged and without a voice. When this abuse is experienced by individuals who lack fundamental knowledge of how the legal system operates, are living in constant fear that by denouncing the abuse, their own legal status or the status of a close relative might put them in jeopardy of being deported or the person struggles with the language, the traumatizing experience is graver.

The number of immigrants residing in Connecticut has surpassed the fourteen percent of the state's population according to the US Census. Of that universe, more than half are Latinos, which is most of the population I have worked with. Many of these individuals have limited English proficiency, lack formal education, work in low skilled industries, and do not have ready access to the health system, either because they lack insurance or because of their immigration status.

The Task Force reports puts the spotlight on the inordinate amount of cases being handled by the system and the difficulties faced by the crisis hotline which manages more than thirty percent of calls from immigrants with language barriers and with the majority of the calls taking place on the weekends when staffing at shelters is very limited. I fully support the recommendations from the Task Force, including addressing the need for qualified language interpreters and the availability of twenty four hour staff at the domestic violence shelters. We are in dire need for more training in the judicial system in this area. Particularly, I am concerned that due to the complexity of immigration law we are treating people unfairly.

For all the above stated reasons, I urge the Judiciary Committee to vote favorably on this bill.

Thank you for your time.