



California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Governor Signs Bill to Aid Victims of Human Trafficking

Governor Schwarzenegger today signed SB 1569 (Kuehl), a bill sponsored by the California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative and the San Francisco District Attorneys Office that provides critical assistance to immigrant victims of human trafficking, domestic violence and other serious crimes while they await processing by federal agencies. Under existing law, these individuals have access to most federal or state services, but not until they are federally certified, a process that can take months. SB 1569 (Kuehl) won broad bi-partisan support from California legislators, victim service providers, faith-based organizations and law enforcement officials. It becomes effective on January 1, 2007.

"Victims of human trafficking have been subjected to terrible crimes and when they're rescued or manage to flee their abusers, they need help immediately," declared Reshma Shamasunder, Director of CIWC, "If we want to put a stop to human trafficking we need to help traumatized victims right away so that they can help prosecute the criminals-- that's what this new law will do," added Shamasunder.

Victims of human trafficking and their advocates say the new law helps provide victims with desperately needed safe places to live, immediate attention to medical and mental health needs and the skills to make a new life. They say that without this assistance, victims have difficulty working effectively with the authorities to prosecute their abusers.

"We have clients who are willing to work with authorities, especially when they know that their assistance might save someone else from experiencing what they went through," said Susan Bowyer, Managing Attorney with the International Institute of the East Bay, "but it's so difficult to ask this of a victim who is unsure where she is going to sleep next, or hasn't the resources to buy food, and get stable enough to take this kind of step." The New law also affects immigrants who are victims of domestic violence and other serious crimes.

According to Senator Sheila Kuehl, the bill's author, SB 1569 will serve as a bridge for victims, helping a small number of persons in great need before they transition to existing state or federal services. The bill would treat these survivors like refugees for purposes of benefit eligibility. They would be eligible for existing state or local services, or would have access to refugee services, if they meet the general program criteria.

For further interviews media representatives may call: Nalini Shekar, Director of Advocacy Programs, Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence at 408/ 205-0767

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