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Domestic Violence and Trafficking Advocates Applaud Governor Cuomo for Protecting Families by Ending “Secure Communities” in New York

New York, NY – Advocates for immigrant women who have survived domestic violence or human trafficking are encouraged by Governor Andrew Cuomo’s announcement today that New York State is suspending New York’s participation in a controversial deportation program known as “Secure Communities” (S-Comm). Under the program, the fingerprints of every person booked by the police are checked against Department of Homeland Security databases for immigration violations. The program has been facing increasing national criticism from political leaders, as these past few weeks Illinois Governor Pat Quinn withdrew the state’s participation and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus called on President Obama to freeze the program immediately stating it may “endanger the public.” These voices join the growing number of organizations that have been working to halt ICE’s mass deportation agenda and to bring attention to how S-Comm fuels racial profiling, mistrust in police, and unfair deportations.

On May 9, a dozen organizations that provide services for thousands of survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking sent a letter to Governor Cuomo explaining how S-Comm would make New Yorkers less secure and undermine the decades of work advocates have done to increase protections for these survivors. These organizations took the opportunity to alert the Governor that, by participating in S-Comm, New York is helping to perpetuate the cycle of abuse against victims of domestic violence and human trafficking by giving abusers and traffickers yet another way to control their victims.

S-Comm would foster increased fear of police. Abusers and traffickers often threaten their victims with false arrests and deportation, and S-Comm would effectuate this threat. Advocates also argue that the program endangers New Yorkers by deterring immigrant community members from participating in police investigations, particularly in domestic violence situations where the arrest of both parties is a common occurrence. Even wrongful arrests can lead to detention and deportation under Secure Communities—as reports have shown has happened to women under S-Comm in Florida, Maryland and California. “Secure Communities jeopardizes not just the fundamental human rights of the immigrant women we serve, but the resilience and vitality of the community they reside in” said Tiloma Jayasinghe, Executive Director of Sakhi for South Asian Women. “It prevents people facing domestic violence from reaching out for help from the police, even if they are being severely abused for fear that they or their family will be punished. As advocates, we know that any perceived cooperation between immigration and local law enforcement has a chilling effect on what is already an underreported crime. The Governor’s stand will allow us to continue our efforts toward effective community policing to protect the people we serve.”

In addition to the possibility of their own deportation, people whose partners have been deported face a heavy economic and emotional toll in trying to keep their families together. In order to keep a partner out of an unjust deportation system, many victims of domestic violence will allow abuse to escalate. According to Cecilia Gastón, Executive Director of Violence Intervention Program, Inc., “For our women victims of domestic violence throughout the state, Secure Communities is a huge deterrent to seeking help. We should not allow the threat of deportation to stand in the way of our families’ safety. The Governor has taken a significant step to recognize the damage S-Comm would cause to all our communities.”

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