

Attn: Chair Becker-Finn and members of the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee

RE: HF 321--Certifications for Victims of Crimes

My name is Michelle Rivero. I am the Director of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs for the City of Minneapolis. I submit this statement in support of HF 321, which would create a statutory processing time for law enforcement certification requests for crime victims statewide.

The City of Minneapolis passed a similar certification ordinance in 2017. Our ordinance provides a 30-day timeline for decision on U (crime victim visa) certification requests, with a 7-day turnaround for expedite requests. Three City offices are currently equipped to process certification requests: the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD), Department of Civil Rights, and City Attorney's Office. A snapshot of MPD's recent certifications shows that in 2019 there were 429 total certification requests processed, and in 2020, 342 certification requests processed.

This ordinance has resulted in several concrete successes, including: 1) increasing the level of trust between immigrant community members and law enforcement, 2) helping law enforcement officers obtain victim assistance in the investigation of crime, and 3) encouraging immigrant victims of crime to take a first step towards obtaining immigration status in the United States, thereby promoting immigrant integration in our communities. Additional information about the City of Minneapolis's U/T Visa ordinance and implementation can be found here: <http://www2.minneapolismn.gov/attorney/WCMSP-211876>.

It is important to note that measures such as the City of Minneapolis ordinance and the instant bill, HF321, do not require law enforcement officers or other authorized certifiers to approve certifications, instead they provide a timeline within which a decision whether to certify or not must be made. Why is this important? Because the longer it takes for a certifier to make a decision, the greater the potential for revictimizing survivors of crime. Our city is committed to bringing justice and building trust with community. A transparent certification process with a clear deadline increases accountability, builds trust, creates safety and provide justice to victims. This is an important step in encouraging our residents to engage in public safety initiatives and assist in preventing crime in our communities.

If passed, HF321 would also provide an excellent opportunity for law enforcement officers to better understand the U visa certification process and the federal legislation that created this immigration related visa category for crime victims, particularly in areas of the state where law enforcement may be less familiar with the certification process.

HF321 indicates that a certifying entity is prohibited from disclosing the immigration status of a victim of criminal activity or representative requesting the certification, and the proposed amendment to the bill, which would classify data provided to the certifying agency as private data. These are very important provisions, as they provide a measure of confidence to victims and clarity to certifying officers regarding their responsibilities around this extremely sensitive information. I would note that the Minneapolis certification ordinance also contains a data protection provision.

For the reasons explained above, HF321 represents an important legislative initiative and believe this bill is worthy of strong support. Thank you for your consideration of this letter and please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Michelle Rivero, Director
Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs
Department of Neighborhood and Community Relations
City of Minneapolis
Phone: 612-394-6018
Email: Michelle.rivero@minneapolismn.gov