



Central American Women and Children Protection Act

As participants in the Shine the Light Conference on Human Trafficking, we encourage Members of Congress to support and co-sponsor the Central American Women and Children Protection Act being re-introduced in both the House and Senate.

Background

Representative Ann Wagner (R-MO), one of our Honorary Co-Chairs, is expected to re-introduce the Central American Women and Children Protection Act this week with Rep. Norma Torres (D-CA). Together, in May 2019, they originally introduced this bill in the last session of Congress. Following the 2020 congressional elections and the beginning of a new session of Congress in January of this year, legislation must be introduced again and start from the beginning.

The bill likely will be referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

As happened in the last congressional session, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) also is preparing to re-introduce the Central American Women and Children Protection Act this week in the Senate. In the last session of Congress, the bill had 24 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle (both democrats and republicans), indicating strong support among senators.

The Senate version is expected to be referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The legislation would authorize appropriations for the Department of State for the next three years to provide assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (the “Northern Triangle of Central America”) to increase protection of women and children in their homes and communities and reduce female homicides, domestic violence, and sexual assault. No funds would go directly to the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras and options to suspend all funding are provided.

Purpose

The 2021 bill is expected to be nearly identical to the 2019 version, which would:

- Authorize the U.S. Secretary of State to enter into bilateral “Women and Children Protection Compacts” with the three Northern Triangle countries to establish plans that would:
 - Strengthen their criminal justice systems and civil protection courts to protect women and children and serve victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse and neglect and hold perpetrators accountable;
 - Create and sustain safe communities to prevent and deter violence against women and children;
 - Ensure schools are safe and promote prevention and early detection of gender-based and domestic abuse within communities; and

- Provide security within the region to families and unaccompanied children fleeing domestic, gang, or drug violence.
- Provide \$20,000,000 (in the House) or \$10,000,000 (in the Senate) each of the three years to carry out the plans (above) provided the countries entered into the Compacts. Regardless, no funds would go directly to the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras and options to suspend all funding are provided. The legislation prohibits funding going to the governments.
- Require reporting to Congress, including on implementation of the compacts and information on gender-based violence, child welfare systems for unaccompanied children, violence against children, and the capacity of police, prosecution services and courts to combat violence against women and children in the countries.

Why Support and Co-Sponsor

This bill addresses the threats to many women and children in the Northern Triangle who, because of failed or marginalized states, are frequent victims of lawlessness and violence.

Participants in the Human Trafficking Conference are particularly concerned about the vulnerability of all the people in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras who are living in violence and fear, in sickness and hunger, without employment and without many options.

This vulnerability often leads to exploitation of all kinds, including labor and sex trafficking – particularly for those who are forced to flee their homes in search of safety.

The Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have among the highest homicide rates in the world. In 2017, there were 60 homicides per 100,000 people in El Salvador, 43.6 homicides per 100,000 people in Honduras, and 26.1 homicides per 100,000 people in Guatemala.

Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are characterized by a high prevalence of drug- and gang-related violence, murder, and crimes involving sexual- and gender-based violence. The region also has high rates of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual assault.

Central America ranks high among regions of the world for female homicides. A combined 801 women were victims of homicide in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala in 2017 alone, according to the United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime.

El Salvador and Honduras are both among the top 3 countries in the world with the highest child homicides rates, with more than 22 and 32 deaths per 100,000 children respectively, according to the nongovernmental organization Save the Children.

Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador governments allow impunity for perpetrators of violence against women and children, with less than 10 percent of reported cases resulting in conviction.

This bill will help address some of these protection concerns in the region.