

## **TCFV Statement on the House Floor Debate of HB 4**

Wednesday morning, October 25<sup>th</sup>, the [Texas Council on Family Violence](#) shared concerns at a [press conference](#) regarding several bills relating to immigration enforcement on the House Calendar for that day. Among these proposals was [HB 4 \(\(88\)3 Spiller\)](#) which creates a new criminal offense for unlawful entry into the US and authorizes local and State law enforcement to arrest those suspected of this offense and authorizes a broad set of peace officers to detain, transport, and even “remove” them. TCFV’s 45 years of advocacy for survivors of family violence, and the centers that support them, informs our perspective that such initiatives can have an exponentially chilling effect on immigrant victims seeking safety and care in response to violence or reporting crimes. These policies can serve to embolden abusive perpetrators, citizen and not, and threaten both victim safety and that of the broader public.

As an established organization that has worked with the Texas Legislature since our inception in 1978 to promote awareness of challenges and needs facing survivors and the programs that serve them, we were disheartened by some of the devolving discussion and statements made in response to several amendments introduced to create exceptions from enforcement for women and children, and victims of sexual and domestic violence seeking forensic medical exams, support and shelter at Family Violence Centers (FVC) or Rape Crisis Centers. These amendments attempted to offer discreet and minimal protections for vulnerable victims and the programs that serve them in a notably sweeping bill.

In the debate over these amendments, inaccurate statements were made relating to the qualifications needed to operate an FVC and seemed to indicate opening one is a quick and relatively easy process. [Texas law](#), however, requires that any FVC must, in part, “*have been operating... for at least one year...*” offering comprehensive services along with other key provisions before even being eligible for a contract. These FVC’s are not only bound to state statute, they are also required to follow over 80 regulatory rules. Equally concerning were comments made to imply dubious motive on the part of persons seeking help after abuse or assault. These statements, counter to research or facts, were tantamount to victim blaming that we have confronted for decades and displayed a disregard for the impossible choices facing survivors that consider leaving abusive relationships. We applaud those legislators who courageously shared their own experiences and boldly championed survivor safety throughout this difficult and fatiguing debate.

In the final days of October, [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), TCFV encourages law makers to build connection and relationships with their [local Family Violence Centers](#). Taking a tour, learning more about services offered and to whom, and listening to issues and challenges and impacts of laws at the community level will go far to meaningfully grow understanding on the grave safety needs survivors face as lawmakers engage in dialogue and decisions that have deep implications for our state. TCFV stands ready facilitate these meetings and continue our work, in partnership with the Texas Legislature, to promote a safer Texas.