

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-new-publication-and-a-personal-reminder-of-why-the-u-visa-works>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Editor's note: Rodolfo Estrada is a former senior program associate for Vera's Center on Immigration and Justice. He is the author of the new Vera brief [How Law Enforcement Is Using the U-Visa](#) and is currently executive director of the [Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights](#).

In recent years, U.S. law enforcement agencies have had a unique tool at their disposal that helps solve crime and make communities safer: the U-visa. This type of visa grants legal status to immigrant victims of crime who cooperate with law enforcement. Our new brief summarizes the challenges associated with law enforcements use of the U-visa and describes ways that agencies are using this community-policing tool successfully.

For police and sheriffs departments that incorporate use of the U-visa into their day-to-day duties, the gains may include increased reporting by crime victims, less fear of police in immigrant communities, and more collaboration in keeping neighborhoods safe. Similarly, victims who apply for and are granted a U-visa receive life-changing benefits, including legal residence and authorization to work in the United States.

A few months ago, I worked on a pro bono legal case and saw firsthand the benefits of the U-visa for both the police and an immigrant crime victim. My client was the repeated victim of domestic violence, but did not report the crimes because she was undocumented and her abuser threatened to have her deported if she did. After one particularly violent beating, she decided to call the police despite the risk of negative repercussions. Contrary to what she feared, when the police arrived, they arrested her abuser and found her a safe place to recover.

As the result of information she provided to the police and later the district attorney, her abuser was prosecuted and convicted. As the police and district attorney built a case against her abuser, they found a pattern of domestic violence against other women but no past prosecutions or convictions. My clients cooperation with the police and the district attorney was vital to their efforts to take this man off the streets and end a pattern of abuse that might have continued with another victim (or victims). By interacting with the police and district attorney, she learned about the U-visa and decided to apply for onewith support and documentation from both agencies.

During the summer I heard that her application was approved and my client was granted U status. This really drove home for me why the U-visa works: it helps the police solve crime and encourages immigrant victims to come out of the shadows and assist in vital law enforcement activities that improve public safety.

Download the new brief, [How Law Enforcement Is Using the U-Visa](#).

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