



## **Violence Free Minnesota Statement on the Laken Riley Act**

This week, the House approved a bill named the “Laken Riley Act” that would require detention of undocumented immigrants arrested for alleged crimes like larceny, shoplifting, burglary or theft. The bill will be heard in the Senate later this week. The act is named after Laken Riley, a 22-year-old female student killed last year in Georgia by a man who was an undocumented immigrant. He had been arrested and charged with shoplifting but was not detained.

**Violence Free Minnesota unequivocally condemns the creation and approval of the Laken Riley Act.** Bills such as the Laken Riley Act do not promote public safety nor do they decrease violence against women; instead, they perpetuate and normalize xenophobic hatred and lay the groundwork for additional legislation that targets, surveils, punishes, and enacts violence against immigrant communities and communities of color. Yet, research indicates that undocumented immigrants are even less likely to commit crimes of violence than individuals born in the United States. **Such legislation is based on hateful stereotypes, and would not lead to any meaningful reduction in violence against women.**

**We must also acknowledge that such legislation is commonly enacted specifically in cases of white women killed by undocumented immigrant men, or immigrant men who are immediately assumed to be undocumented.** Laken Riley was white. In 2018, Mollie Tibbetts, a 20-year-old white female student in Iowa, was killed in a random act of violence by an undocumented man. Her murder was immediately politicized nationwide and was used to promote xenophobic rhetoric that also targeted undocumented immigrants. Laken and Mollie’s deaths were horrific, but their murders were outliers, not part of a pattern. **When legislators don’t take actual, defined patterns of violence seriously, such as the link between gun ownership and intimate partner homicide, communities suffer.**

**Legislation such as the Laken Riley Act not only generates racist, xenophobic fear mongering; it stands in stark contrast to widespread apathy across public safety systems, elected officials, and the public in response to the crises of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and missing and murdered Black women and girls.** The answer to these crises is not xenophobic legislation, of course, but the general public outcry and media attention after white women are murdered, and the accompanying swift legislative response in some such cases, is not present when women of color are murdered.

**Ending violence against women and promoting public safety requires transformation of a culture that normalizes and condones such violence. Bills such as the Laken Riley Act will never achieve this transformation,** and if enacted will instead cause untold devastation and harm to communities already facing disproportionate surveillance and punishment.