

FORGED IN THE FIRE

Know Your Rights: Legal Protections for Trafficking Survivors

A General Legal Information Guide

Prepared for: Forged in the Fire Knowledge Base

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Educational resource — not legal, medical, or clinical advice

This publication is provided for educational and informational purposes only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, mental health advice, or a substitute for trained professional support. Individuals who may be experiencing trafficking or exploitation should contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, text 233733, or visit humantraffickinghotline.org. If there is immediate danger, call 911.

This document provides general legal information only and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Survivors should consult a qualified attorney or legal services organization for advice about their specific situation.

Know Your Rights: A Survivor-Centered Overview of Legal Protections, Remedies, and Pathways for Human Trafficking Survivors

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A Note on the Limits of This Paper

This paper provides general information about legal protections for trafficking survivors and is intended to support nonprofit education, advocacy, donor and grant communication, staff training, and informed referral. It is not legal advice. Personalized legal advice for any specific person should come from a qualified attorney, ideally one with anti-trafficking specialty experience. Throughout the paper, referral to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888 / text 233733) and to OVC-funded legal services and trafficking-specialized legal organizations is centered.

Executive Summary

Human trafficking survivors in the United States hold rights and have access to remedies under a layered set of federal and state laws, regulations, and agency programs. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), as amended, established the substantive and procedural backbone for survivor protections, including federal benefits eligibility through the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) certification process, immigration relief (Continued Presence, T and U visas), mandatory restitution, and civil remedies (22 U.S.C. § 7102; 18 U.S.C. §§ 1593, 1595; ACF, n.d.; USCIS, n.d.; DHS, 2023). The Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA), 18 U.S.C. § 3771, provides a separate set of participation rights in federal criminal proceedings, including notice, attendance, the right to be heard at key stages, conferral with the prosecutor, and restitution (DOJ, n.d.; Cornell Legal Information Institute [LII], n.d.). EEOC and Department of Labor authorities provide enforcement of labor rights including wage rights for undocumented workers and protection against retaliation (EEOC, n.d.; DOL, n.d.). California adds vacatur relief under Penal Code §§ 236.14 and 236.15, victim compensation through the California Victim Compensation Board, and Marsy's Law victim rights under the California Constitution (California Office of the Attorney General, 2023).

This paper synthesizes the rights framework with attention to survivor-centered practice, confidentiality, and the practical realities of accessing legal help. It addresses how Forged in the Fire and partners can support survivor access to rights without offering legal advice. It is organized to support both donor education and staff training and includes referral guidance for further learning.

I. Introduction

Knowing one's rights is itself a protective factor. Survivors who understand the federal certification process, immigration relief options, criminal justice participation rights, civil remedies, vacatur relief, and labor rights are better positioned to make informed choices about disclosure, cooperation, services, and recovery (NCVLI, n.d.; ACF OTIP, 2018). Nonprofit organizations, including Forged in the Fire, are well positioned to share rights information at a general educational level and to support warm referrals to qualified attorneys, legal aid programs, and federally funded victim service providers.

This paper synthesizes the controlling legal and policy framework with attention to (a) what rights exist, (b) how rights are accessed, (c) how rights are protected even when survivors cannot or choose not to

participate in criminal proceedings, (d) how rights interact with confidentiality and mandated reporting, and (e) what role nonprofit staff can play without practicing law.

II. Definitions and Scope

For purposes of this paper, "rights" includes (a) statutory rights conferred by federal and state statutes, (b) constitutional rights (including First Amendment, Due Process, and California's Marsy's Law), (c) regulatory benefits eligibility (such as ORR certification), (d) procedural rights in criminal and civil proceedings, and (e) labor and employment protections enforceable by federal and state agencies. The TVPA is the primary federal substantive framework for trafficking survivors; the CVRA is the primary federal procedural framework for victim participation in federal criminal cases; immigration relief operates within the framework of the Immigration and Nationality Act and TVPA reauthorizations (DOJ, 2024; USCIS, n.d.).

The scope of this paper does not include detailed treatment of every state law, every federal benefits program, or every immigration or civil cause of action. It instead surveys the categories most relevant to survivor advocacy in California and to Forged in the Fire's likely educational and referral activities.

III. Current Research and Data on Rights Access

The empirical record on survivor rights access is uneven. Federal grantee data show that rights-related services—legal advocacy, immigration assistance, restitution support, and benefits enrollment—are among the most consistently requested and resource-intensive elements of victim service work (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2024; OVC, n.d.). The Office for Victims of Crime supports a network of OVC-funded victim service providers nationally and a separate network of trafficking-specific legal services providers; in fiscal year 2021–2022, approximately 63% of clients served by OVC-funded grantees were U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents and 31% were foreign nationals (BJS, 2024).

The National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI) at Lewis & Clark Law School operates as the central national source of legal technical assistance on victim rights enforcement; it supports victim litigation clinics in twelve states and the District of Columbia, including California, that provide free legal services to crime victims, with explicit attention to trafficking survivors (NCVLI, n.d.). Polaris Project's National Human Trafficking Hotline data continue to show that legal referrals are among the most common service connections requested by hotline contacts (Polaris Project, 2025).

Research on survivor rights enforcement is limited but consistent in identifying barriers including underrepresentation of trafficking-specialized attorneys, geographic gaps in legal services, language and cultural barriers, fear of retaliation by traffickers, fear of immigration enforcement, and concerns about confidentiality (Macy & Johns, 2011; Phillips et al., 2024). Survivors of forced criminality, undocumented survivors, LGBTQ+ survivors, and labor trafficking survivors face documented additional barriers.

IV. Legal and Policy Framework (Core Section)

This section provides a layered overview of the federal and California rights framework most relevant to survivors.

A. Federal Statutory Framework: The TVPA

The TVPA of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-386), as reauthorized in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2017, and 2018, established the modern federal framework. Key elements include:

Definitions of severe forms of trafficking (22 U.S.C. § 7102), framing the substantive scope of survivor protections.

Federal criminal statutes at 18 U.S.C. §§ 1581–1597, including forced labor (§ 1589), sex trafficking (§ 1591), and document servitude (§ 1592) (DOJ, 2024).

Mandatory restitution under 18 U.S.C. § 1593, requiring sentencing courts to order restitution to trafficking victims for the full amount of losses, including the value of services compelled.

Civil remedy under 18 U.S.C. § 1595, allowing survivors to bring civil actions against traffickers and certain third-party beneficiaries with knowledge of trafficking. The civil cause of action operates independently of any criminal case.

Federal benefits and services through the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) certification process (described below).

Immigration relief through Continued Presence, T visas, and U visas (described below).

B. ORR Certification and Federal Benefits

Under the TVPA, HHS is the sole federal agency authorized to certify foreign adult victims of trafficking and to determine eligibility for foreign minor victims of trafficking for benefits and services available to refugees (ACF, n.d.). Certification (for adults) and eligibility determination (for minors) are issued by ORR. With ORR certification, foreign-national survivors are eligible for federal and state benefits to the same extent as a refugee, including:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI), where applicable

Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)

Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)

The Matching Grant Program (for adults)

Case management, employment services, and other refugee services

Housing, mental health, medical care, and limited legal services through ORR-funded providers (ACF, n.d.; OVC, n.d.)

U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident survivors do not require ORR certification to access federal benefits but may access many of the same services through other federal and state funding streams, including OVC Victim Assistance grants, state crime victim compensation, Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, HUD, and SSA programs (BJS, 2024; OVC, n.d.).

C. Immigration Relief

Three federal immigration mechanisms are relevant to survivors:

Continued Presence (CP). A temporary immigration designation issued at the request of federal law enforcement (such as Homeland Security Investigations or the FBI) for trafficking victims who may be potential witnesses. CP authorizes the survivor to remain in the United States for an initial period of two years (renewable), provides federal employment authorization, and triggers eligibility for federal benefits (DHS, 2023; ICE, n.d.).

T Nonimmigrant Status (T visa). A longer-term status of up to four years for severe-form trafficking victims who comply with reasonable law enforcement requests for assistance, with statutory exceptions and exemptions for minors and individuals unable to cooperate due to physical or psychological trauma (USCIS, n.d.). T visa holders may eventually adjust to lawful permanent resident status. T visa holders may also petition for certain qualifying family members. Approval triggers eligibility for federal benefits to the same extent as a refugee.

U Nonimmigrant Status (U visa). Available to victims of certain qualifying crimes, including human trafficking, who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse and are helpful to law enforcement (USCIS, n.d.). U visa holders may eventually adjust to lawful permanent resident status.

Federal regulations and USCIS policy guidance govern the procedural details, including required forms, certification requests, evidentiary standards, and adjustment of status procedures. Specialized immigration counsel is typically essential.

D. Federal Criminal Justice Participation Rights: The Crime Victims' Rights Act

The Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA), 18 U.S.C. § 3771, provides federal crime victims (including trafficking survivors in federal cases) with the following rights:

The right to be reasonably protected from the accused

The right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court or parole proceeding involving the crime

The right not to be excluded from any such public court proceeding (with limited exception)

The right to be reasonably heard at any public proceeding involving release, plea, sentencing, or parole

The reasonable right to confer with the prosecutor in the case

The right to full and timely restitution as provided by law

The right to proceedings free from unreasonable delay

The right to be treated with fairness and respect for the victim's dignity and privacy

The right to be informed in a timely manner of any plea bargain or deferred prosecution agreement

The right to be informed of the rights under this section, the services available, and the contact information for the Office of the Victims' Rights Ombudsman (LII, n.d.; DOJ, n.d.).

A "crime victim" is a person directly and proximately harmed by the offense, with statutory provisions for legal guardians or representatives where the victim is a minor, incompetent, incapacitated, or deceased (LII, n.d.). Importantly, NCVLI guidance affirms that forced criminal acts that a trafficked person engaged in as a result of being trafficked generally do not diminish the person's "victim" status for purposes of asserting victims' rights (NCVLI, n.d.).

E. Federal Civil and Restitution Remedies

Mandatory restitution under 18 U.S.C. § 1593 is among the most important and underused remedies. Restitution must be ordered for "the full amount of the victim's losses," which has been interpreted to include the value of services compelled by the trafficker (DOJ, 2024). The civil cause of action under 18 U.S.C. § 1595 allows survivors to recover damages and reasonable attorneys' fees from traffickers and from anyone who knowingly benefits financially from a venture that the actor knew or should have known was engaged in trafficking. The statute of limitations for the civil action is ten years from when the cause of action arose or, for minors, ten years after attaining majority. Civil litigation operates independently of criminal prosecution.

F. Confidentiality, Privacy, and Mandated Reporting

Survivors have privacy interests under the CVRA and various funding-stream confidentiality protections. OVC-funded victim service providers operate under specific confidentiality requirements; ORR-funded providers operate under HHS confidentiality rules; and many state-level victim advocate-survivor communications are protected by statutory privilege (in California, the sexual assault counselor-victim privilege under Cal. Evid. Code § 1035 et seq., and the domestic violence counselor-victim privilege under § 1037). However, confidentiality is not absolute. Mandated reporting laws, subpoenas, court orders, and limited statutory exceptions may require disclosure (CDSS, 2023; California Office of the Attorney General, 2023). Confidentiality assurances should be accurate and never overstated.

G. Federal Labor and Employment Rights

Labor trafficking survivors have access to several federal labor-rights authorities:

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race and national origin and retaliation. The EEOC has filed labor trafficking cases under Title VII and has issued guidance noting that workers are protected from discrimination regardless of immigration status and that retaliation for asserting workplace rights is unlawful regardless of immigration status (EEOC, n.d.).

The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division enforces the Fair Labor Standards Act (minimum wage, overtime), the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, the H-2A and H-2B temporary worker programs, and other authorities. Workers are entitled to pay for work actually performed, regardless of immigration status (DOL, n.d.).

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration enforces workplace safety standards regardless of immigration status. The National Labor Relations Board protects collective action rights.

For labor trafficking survivors, restitution and civil remedies under 18 U.S.C. §§ 1593 and 1595 may be combined with wage and hour recovery, Title VII discrimination claims, and state-level labor remedies. California provides robust state-level wage protections through the Labor Commissioner's office and the Private Attorneys General Act, though available remedies vary.

H. California-Specific Rights

California provides several additional protections:

California Penal Code § 236.1 is the state's human trafficking criminal statute; survivors of state cases are crime victims under California law (Cal. Pen. Code § 236.1).

California Penal Code §§ 236.14 and 236.15 provide vacatur relief, allowing survivors to petition courts to vacate non-violent convictions arising from their trafficking victimization. The Attorney General's Vacatur Toolkit provides guidance for survivors and attorneys (California Office of the Attorney General, 2023).

California Constitution Article I, Section 28 (Marsy's Law) provides crime victims with state constitutional rights, including notice, presence, conferral with the prosecutor, restitution, and protection from the defendant.

California Victim Compensation Board provides reimbursement for crime-related expenses, including medical, mental health, relocation, funeral, and certain other costs, regardless of immigration status (subject to program rules).

California Welfare and Institutions Code provisions govern state TANF (CalWORKs), Medi-Cal, and other state benefits, with refugee-equivalent eligibility for ORR-certified survivors.

California Education Code provisions integrate trafficking awareness into K–12 health education and into mandated training in many professional fields (Cal. Educ. Code §§ 49414.4, 51934).

California Labor Code provisions govern wage and hour, anti-retaliation, and immigration-related worker protection. Cal. Lab. Code § 244 prohibits employers from reporting or threatening to report employees' immigration status in retaliation for asserting workplace rights.

California Government Code provisions establish the California Sex Offender Registration Act and various civil remedies.

Civil harassment restraining orders under Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 527.6 and domestic violence restraining orders under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act may be available depending on the relationship between the survivor and trafficker.

V. Risk Factors and Vulnerabilities Affecting Rights Access

Several documented factors affect whether and how survivors can access their rights.

Immigration status. Fear of immigration enforcement chills cooperation, disclosure, and benefits access. Federal trafficking-specific protections (CP, T, U) and California's worker protection statutes are designed to mitigate this fear, but survivors frequently distrust assurances based on prior experiences (USCIS, n.d.; Cal. Lab. Code § 244).

Language access. Limited-English-proficiency survivors face barriers in benefits enrollment, court participation, and legal counsel. Federal and state funded services are subject to Title VI language access requirements, but quality and availability vary (HHS, n.d.).

Criminal records. Survivors with criminal records arising from coerced offenses may face restrictions on housing, employment, and benefits. Vacatur relief under California Penal Code §§ 236.14 and 236.15 is available but underutilized (California Office of the Attorney General, 2023).

Cooperation requirements. Some immigration and benefits pathways involve cooperation with law enforcement. Statutory exceptions and exemptions exist for minors and survivors unable to cooperate due to trauma, but navigating these provisions requires legal counsel (USCIS, n.d.).

Trauma and capacity. Acute trauma, untreated mental health conditions, substance use, and developmental differences affect survivors' ability to engage with multistep rights processes. Trauma-informed legal services are emerging but uneven (Macy & Johns, 2011; Hopper, 2017).

Geographic disparities. Trafficking-specialized legal services are concentrated in major urban areas. Rural survivors may face significant access gaps (NCVLI, n.d.; OVC, n.d.).

VI. Recruitment, Grooming, and Control Tactics: Implications for Rights

Trafficker control tactics directly affect rights access. Document confiscation impedes benefits enrollment, immigration applications, and employment. Threats of immigration consequences chill rights assertion. Financial control means survivors often lack means to retain counsel. Trauma-coercive bonding and shame produce ambivalence about pursuing remedies. Digital surveillance can persist after exit and complicate communications with attorneys, advocates, and benefits agencies (Polaris Project, 2017; Casassa et al., 2021; NNEDV Safety Net, n.d.).

These dynamics underscore the importance of advocate-mediated rights education, secure communication, and patience with the multistep nature of rights access.

VII. Survivor Impact: How Rights Information Functions in Recovery

The literature suggests that informed survivors—survivors who understand certification, immigration relief, restitution, civil remedies, and participation rights—report greater sense of agency and better engagement with services (Macy & Johns, 2011; Hickie, 2017). Rights information itself is a form of trauma-informed care: it restores some of the autonomy and predictability stolen during exploitation.

At the same time, rights information can be overwhelming, particularly when delivered in dense legal language, in environments that re-traumatize, or in ways that imply the survivor must immediately make decisions. Trauma-informed rights education is paced, repeated, layered, and accompanied by emotional support and peer connection (SAMHSA, 2014; ACF OTIP, 2018).

Survivors should never be pressured into participating in criminal proceedings, immigration applications, or civil litigation. The right to decline participation, to take time, to change one's mind, and to seek second opinions is itself a fundamental aspect of trauma-informed practice (NSN, n.d.; ACF OTIP, 2018).

VIII. Service and Intervention Models: Connecting Survivors with Rights

Rights access for survivors typically involves multiple coordinated entry points.

Direct legal services. Trafficking-specialized legal services providers (often funded through OVC, OTIP, or state grants) provide free representation in immigration, vacatur, restitution, civil litigation, and family law matters. The NCVLI-supported victim litigation clinic network provides free legal services to crime victims in twelve states and DC, including California (NCVLI, n.d.; OVC, n.d.).

Pro bono partnerships. Many large law firms have anti-trafficking pro bono programs, often coordinated through legal aid intermediaries.

Hotline-mediated referrals. The National Human Trafficking Hotline maintains referral relationships with legal services providers nationally and can route inquiries to local resources (Polaris Project, n.d.).

Victim service providers. OVC-funded victim service providers integrate legal advocacy into broader case management, often including benefits enrollment, housing navigation, mental health, and employment support (OVC, n.d.).

Government agency assistance. Survivors may obtain direct assistance from EEOC (workplace discrimination), DOL Wage and Hour Division (wage claims), state Labor Commissioner offices, and state attorneys general anti-trafficking units (EEOC, n.d.; DOL, n.d.).

Court-based victim/witness coordinators. Federal and state courts have victim/witness staff who can assist survivors with notice, attendance, and restitution in criminal proceedings (DOJ, n.d.).

For Forged in the Fire and similar nonprofits, the recommended model is to provide general rights education, support survivors in understanding their options, and refer to qualified legal counsel for case-specific advice. Nonprofit staff who are not licensed attorneys should not provide legal advice or fill out legal forms beyond ministerial assistance.

IX. Prevention and Public Awareness

Public awareness of survivor rights serves three functions: (a) helping survivors and at-risk individuals understand their options before crisis; (b) helping community members—family, friends, faith leaders, employers, healthcare providers—make informed referrals; and (c) building public support for the resources and policies that make rights enforceable.

Effective rights-focused awareness should emphasize that:

Rights exist regardless of cooperation with law enforcement

Federal benefits eligibility is available through ORR certification for foreign-national survivors and through other channels for U.S. citizen survivors

Immigration relief is available for eligible noncitizen survivors; legal counsel is essential

Restitution and civil remedies are available

Vacatur relief is available in California for non-violent convictions arising from trafficking

Workers, including undocumented workers, are entitled to pay for work performed and protection from retaliation

Confidentiality protections exist but are not absolute

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is the recommended first point of contact for rights questions

Awareness messaging should respect survivor autonomy, avoid pressuring survivors to "press charges," and avoid creating impressions that rights are conditional on prosecution outcomes.

X. Relevance to Forged in the Fire

Rights education and informed referral are among Forged in the Fire's most scalable and credible contributions to the anti-trafficking field. The organization can build a standardized rights education module suitable for community education, donor briefings, partner training, and survivor orientation, anchored in this paper's framework. The module should be updated annually given the relatively rapid pace of regulatory change in immigration, benefits, and California vacatur practice.

Forged in the Fire should also build a referral network including the National Human Trafficking Hotline; California's anti-trafficking legal services providers (such as the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking [CAST], Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, Tahirih Justice Center, immigration legal aid organizations, and the Consumer Action Law Center anti-trafficking project where applicable); the California Victim Compensation Board; the California Office of the Attorney General; OVC and ORR-funded local providers; and pro bono law firm partners. Referral relationships should be documented in a referral protocol available to all staff.

For survivors served directly by Forged in the Fire, intake should include a clear rights orientation, paced and trauma-informed, with appropriate translation and interpreter access, and with explicit acknowledgment that survivors are not required to make decisions immediately. Confidentiality, mandated reporting, and the limits of nonprofit (non-attorney) advice should be communicated transparently at the outset.

The organization can also support policy advocacy for stronger rights enforcement: improved restitution collection, expanded vacatur relief, stronger language access, sustained funding for victim service providers, and immigration policy that supports rather than chills cooperation. Policy advocacy should be conducted in coalition with survivor-led organizations, victim service networks, and bar associations.

Finally, Forged in the Fire's public communications should accurately represent rights, never overstate confidentiality, never pressure participation, and always direct readers to qualified legal counsel for personalized advice.

XI. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations are particularly important in rights work.

Avoiding the unauthorized practice of law. Nonprofit staff who are not licensed attorneys must not provide legal advice. They may provide general legal information, ministerial assistance, and referral. The line between information and advice can be subtle; staff training and supervision should be explicit (American Bar Association [ABA], 2017).

Respecting survivor autonomy. Survivors have the right to decline participation in criminal proceedings, immigration applications, civil litigation, or any other rights-related process. Pressuring survivors—even with the best intentions—replicates coercion and is contraindicated by survivor-informed practice (ACF OTIP, 2018; NSN, n.d.).

Honest confidentiality. Confidentiality protections exist but are limited. Staff should explain limits before survivors share information, including mandated reporting obligations and possible subpoena scenarios.

Cultural humility. Rights frameworks were not developed with all communities in mind, and the lived experience of rights enforcement varies substantially by race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender

identity, and class. Staff should engage rights education with humility about these limits (Phillips et al., 2024).

Storytelling and consent. Survivor stories used in rights-focused awareness must follow OTIP and NSN survivor-informed practice standards: informed, ongoing, and revocable consent; compensation; and survivor approval over framing and identification (ACF OTIP, 2018; NSN, n.d.).

Avoiding rescue framing. Rights work is most credible when it centers the survivor's own decisions and agency rather than the helper's investment in particular outcomes.

Avoiding savior framing in faith contexts. Faith-based nonprofits should be especially attentive to ensuring that rights information is offered without spiritual conditions (Hodge, 2014).

XII. Gaps, Challenges, and Future Research

Several gaps remain in rights access and rights-related research.

Restitution enforcement. Federal mandatory restitution is ordered in many cases but collected at substantially lower rates. Improved enforcement, victim notification, and asset tracing remain research and policy priorities (DOJ, 2024; NCVLI, n.d.).

Vacatur access. California's vacatur statutes are robust on paper but underutilized in practice, particularly outside major urban areas. Research on barriers and on best-practice vacatur clinic models is ongoing (California Office of the Attorney General, 2023).

Immigration policy volatility. Federal immigration policy and USCIS practice change frequently. Rights education must be regularly updated, and rights enforcement is sensitive to policy shifts (USCIS, n.d.).

Confidentiality clarity. Confidentiality rules vary across funding streams, professional disciplines, and jurisdictions. Survivors and advocates would benefit from clearer, consolidated guidance (CDSS, 2023; ACF, n.d.).

Civil litigation capacity. Section 1595 civil cases have grown but remain limited by cost, evidentiary challenges, and statute of limitations issues. Continued capacity-building and case law development are needed (DOJ, 2024).

Labor trafficking rights. Labor trafficking survivors face under-developed rights infrastructure relative to sex trafficking survivors, despite likely greater prevalence (Owens et al., 2014; EEOC, n.d.).

Survivor-led legal services. Models that integrate compensated survivor leadership into legal services—including peer advocacy, intake, and policy advocacy—are increasing but under-evaluated (NSN, n.d.).

Outcome research. Rigorous outcome research on rights enforcement (benefits enrollment, immigration approvals, restitution collected, vacatur orders entered) and on its relationship to survivor wellbeing is limited (Macy & Johns, 2011).

XIII. Recommendations

For Forged in the Fire and partners, the following recommendations are evidence-informed.

First, publish a survivor-facing rights overview anchored in this paper's framework, with clear language, multiple languages, and explicit statements that the document is general information and not legal advice.

Second, build a referral network including the National Human Trafficking Hotline, OVC- and OTIP-funded legal services providers, NCVLI-supported victim litigation clinics, immigration legal aid, and California Office of the Attorney General resources. Document the referral protocol in writing.

Third, train staff on the line between legal information and legal advice and on the unauthorized practice of law. Establish a clear policy that case-specific legal questions are referred to attorneys.

Fourth, center survivor autonomy in every rights interaction. Never pressure participation in any legal process.

Fifth, provide trauma-informed pacing and language access to all rights communications, including translation, interpreters, plain language, and repetition.

Sixth, maintain content currency, updating rights education at least annually given regulatory change.

Seventh, partner with vacatur clinics and legal services providers in California to facilitate access to Penal Code §§ 236.14–236.15 relief.

Eighth, engage in coalition policy advocacy for restitution enforcement, vacatur access, immigration relief, language access, and sustained funding for victim service providers.

Ninth, adopt explicit confidentiality and mandated reporting policies and communicate them transparently.

Tenth, center compensated survivor leadership in rights education content and review.

XIV. Conclusion

The U.S. and California legal frameworks provide substantial rights, remedies, and benefits for trafficking survivors—on paper. Rights become real only through informed access, trained advocates, qualified legal counsel, and a service ecosystem that values survivor autonomy. Forged in the Fire's contribution to this ecosystem will rest on disciplined adherence to the line between general information and legal advice, on robust referral relationships, on trauma-informed pacing, on bias-aware communication, and on visible respect for the survivor's authority over their own choices. With those commitments, rights education becomes itself a healing practice—a restoration of the predictability, options, and voice that trafficking attempted to take.

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This publication is provided for educational and informational purposes only. It is not legal advice, medical advice, mental health advice, or a substitute for trained professional support. Individuals who may be experiencing trafficking or exploitation should contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, text 233733, or visit humantraffickinghotline.org. If there is immediate danger, call 911.

This document provides general legal information only and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Survivors should consult a qualified attorney or legal services organization for advice about their specific situation.