



SURVIVORS

A Community of Healing

Survivors of Torture, International

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To Whom It May Concern:

Subject: Testimony regarding forensic evaluations

Since 1998, Survivors of Torture, International (SURVIVORS) in San Diego, has provided mental health and other direct services to survivors of torture from around the world who experienced severe trauma at the hands of brutal dictators, government officials, and unchecked gangs. Each week, SURVIVORS receives multiple requests from local immigration attorneys to provide forensic psychological and/or medical evaluations for clients when it appears there are sequelae related to the clients' reported torture experiences.

Once SURVIVORS determines if the referred person meets eligibility requirements as a torture survivor, the client is referred to a trained licensed mental health clinician for a comprehensive psychological evaluation. Each psychological evaluation takes on average from four to ten hours to complete, depending on the complexity of the case, interpretation needs, and the client's state of mind.

If evidence of physical torture is found to be consistent with what a client reports, SURVIVORS coordinates a forensic medical evaluation with a licensed physician to conduct an in-person medical evaluation to document the findings in a medical affidavits, which includes photos and diagrams when possible. A forensic medical exam and a medical affidavit typically require two to three hours to complete. Most evaluators provide their services pro bono or low bono.

For more than 25 years, SURVIVORS has been told that this type of forensic documentation (psychological evaluations and medical affidavits) accompanied by the clinicians' CVs are very helpful for judges to make informed decisions as they review the evidence.

SURVIVORS has also been told by immigration judges that its forensic reports have been given full weight and standing on their own, without the need for evaluators to appear in court, and that given the credibility and reputation SURVIVORS has earned over more than two decades, these reports are accepted as submitted.

It is my sincere hope that you accept this explanation of why forensic evaluators are not available to testify in court.

Respectfully,

Katrina Pimental, MSW
Interim Director of Client Care