

Testimony of Pamela Rivera

Before the House Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security

Tuesday, July 23, 2013

I want to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Goodlatte, ranking member Conyers and distinguished members of this committee for this opportunity to testify.

My parents moved to the United States in the 1980's and I was born in 1987. Shortly after my birth they moved back to Colombia with money they had saved working in the US and tried to pursue a life there. They had my sister Evelyn while we were living in Colombia. In 1991 when I was 4 years old they moved back to the U.S. in order to provide a better life for my sister and me. They wanted us to live without the drugs, violence, and daily car bombings that defined daily life in their native Colombia; and for us to have a chance of obtaining a world-class education and fulfilling the American Dream.

For many years I did not know about my family's immigration status. However, as the years passed I began to understand that my family was not like most, and even though my parents worked hard to provide for our family we would never be treated the same. My father worked nights and my mother worked in the morning in order to make sure that my two sisters and I were never left alone. They understood the meaning of family and how important it was to raise their daughters in a stable home.

My mother learned English quickly by volunteering at our school and working with us on our homework. I remember my mom asking my teacher to send home extra homework so that my sister and I would catch up to the other students. My youngest sister was born here in the U.S. in 1993. We all grew up in the same home, attended the same schools, spoke English, and played lacrosse, but there was one major difference that would come to dominate our lives: I was a natural born U.S. citizen while my sister Evelyn was brought to the United States on a now-expired visa.

It wasn't until high school that I found out for sure about my family's immigration status. I was unable to get my drivers license until I was 18 because my parents could not take me to the DMV. There were so many little things that would come up that I could not do or had to work twice as hard to figure out because of this situation. All of this was with the knowledge that my youngest sister and I were U.S. citizens, and that for us there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Evelyn did not have that. She had to go through her high school graduation knowing that there was no relief in sight—no path to college, no path to a normal job. She knew she had to walk across that stage and into the shadows, and that the somewhat normal life she had gotten to live in the only home she had ever known was over. She also had to walk across that stage without our mom watching, because our mother was forced to leave under voluntary departure.

My sisters and I worked hard in school and all earned the Bright Futures Scholarship but unlike our youngest sister and me, Evelyn was unable to claim her scholarship because of her undocumented status.

As a Citizen of the United States, I have been able to pursue the American Dream: I am an alumna of the Florida State University, and am currently pursuing a master's degree at the University of Florida.

Living in a mixed status family I have learned to cherish every moment I have with my family especially since we have lost our mother. We have to be proactive on issues. We have to protect our families. It has now been over 6 years since Eve has seen our mom. It has been 6 years since her life as she knew it came to a halt. This is the only home she knows, she broke no laws, she did nothing wrong, yet she is punished every day and forced to live in limbo—for no reason at all.

The American Dream has been bittersweet for us. I have had to watch my sister be denied the opportunities afforded to us, in the only country she has ever known, by what amounts to an accident of birth.