

Testimony of Rosa Velazquez
Hearing on “Addressing the Immigration Status of Illegal Immigrants
Brought to the United States as Children”

July 22, 2013

I would like to thank Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Lofgren, and the distinguished Members of this Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Rosa Velazquez and I am 30 years old. Ever since I was 5, Arkansas has been my home. And I am as Arkansan as the Arkansas Razorbacks, Harding Bisons and the Henderson Reddies.

I am a member of the United We Dream National Coordinating Committee. United We Dream is the largest immigrant youth-led network in the country, made up of 51 affiliate organizations across 25 states. As a network, United We Dream is committed to winning citizenship for our families and communities—all 11 million Americans without papers—and to creating an immigration system that treats all immigrants with dignity. We will not accept proposals that leave our parents behind or that criminalize our community!

Parents like my mother, who was 22 years old when we came to the US. Sadly, like so many other parents, her story has been forgotten. She made the courageous decision and traveled alone with my 4-year-old brother, Rudy and myself. I was 5. My mother packed all of our things in a backpack, and in August 1989, we got on a plane in Mexico City and we arrived in Dallas, Texas. My father, Rodolfo, came to Arkansas to join us a year later.

I started my education at a public school in Southwest Arkansas. Throughout my schooling, I was involved in every club, organization and civic group I could be a part of. I have always had a desire to be involved but it was in music that I found my passion. I remember that the best performances I had were at Ouachita Baptist University, where I would later be offered a choral scholarship.

And most recently my life changed when I was privileged enough to perform the National Anthem in front of more than 500 undocumented Americans at our first ever mock naturalization ceremony. That moment on Capitol Hill when I led my patriotic community in a tribute to this great country was the most American I have ever felt.

My parents taught me that our family values were greater than anything. And where one went, the rest followed. I can remember vividly the day that I enrolled at Ouachita Baptist University. My parents went with me. I had them with me when I chose my

classes, when I looked at my dorm and when I went into the financial aid office. It was at this office that I found out that I was no longer eligible for a scholarship. I was undocumented, and I saw my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of attending college slip through my fingers because I lacked legal status. This is where I also learned that having a social security number, an Arkansas driver's license and a work authorization document, were not enough. To be fully eligible, I had to be a US citizen. It was then that my mother, through silent tears, took my hand and told me that I could do anything I set my mind to...so if I wanted to go to college, I was going to go to college.

My mother's hardworking hands are the reason that today, I am currently a grad student at Henderson State University and Harding University in Arkansas, pursuing two master's degrees, one in ESL English and one in American Literature. She is the reason that my brother, Rudy, is attending the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, where in two years he will graduate with a Culinary Arts degree. And she is also the reason my twelve year old little brother, Randy, a US citizen, has high hopes and aspirations to attending college in the future.

Arkansas is the poultry capital of the world. We have several poultry processing plants and this is where my mother first began to work. Her job, for the next 10 years, was to cut chicken tenders with scissors, and arrange them in the yellow trays that you are able to purchase at any grocery store. As I sit here today telling you about my achievements and successes, my mother, who has sacrificed everything for me with her hard work, is suffering with carpal tunnel syndrome.

When Members of Congress tell me that I deserve an opportunity to earn citizenship and my mother does not, I tell them that if anyone deserves that opportunity to earn citizenship, it is my mother, Rosalinda.

My mother did what any mother, when facing uncertainty, would have done; provide a better life for her children than she had. Given the circumstances we lived under in Mexico, she knew in her heart that the US would become our home for what has now been 24 years. This is the land of opportunity, where we learned that with hard work and perseverance, we have the opportunity to succeed.

If Congress were to adopt an incomplete solution that would provide a path to earned citizenship for DREAMers like me, but something less for our parents, it would be like saying that I can now be one of you, but my parents can never be. Such a solution would tell DREAMers like me that our hardworking parents are good enough to pick your crops, babysit your children, landscape your yard, and at the same time never treated as equal members of this society. This solution that includes only DREAMers and people like me will only lead to further separation of families and will in no way provide the

solution you seek: fixing our broken immigration system and recognizing the full humanity of those who have been drawn here by the prospects of work.

Do we really want to ignore the values that history has taught us by giving our parents a “sit at the back of the bus” type of legalization?

I was taught at home what this country was founded on: family values, Christian values, courage, equality and justice. Anything other than a viable path to citizenship is not acceptable for me, my family and the other 11 million Undocumented Americans waiting for you to act.

I am talented in many fields and am an asset for this country, but my mother’s working hands are the foundation on which upon this country was built.

I am my mother’s daughter.

She and I are equal.

We both came here in pursuit of a better life and just like millions of Dreamers and families, we are ready to claim our citizenship.

As a representative of the community directly affected by what actions this committee will take on immigration reform, I hope that all members will seek our input as the process moves forward. And I hope that this hearing is the first step in addressing not only a real solution for me, but also for my parents.

My name is Rosa Angela Velazquez Figueroa, daughter of Rosalinda and Rodolfo Velazquez and sister to Rudy and Randy Velazquez.

I am undocumented,
I am one of the 11 Million
and together,
WE are the American DREAM.