



Collection of Stories from Members of Improve The Dream

**Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship and Border Safety**

**“Removing Barriers to Legal Migration to Strengthen our Communities and
Economy”**

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Eti Sinha

I am a Documented Dreamer. The hardships of being forgotten by the immigration system are difficult to put into words and immediately bring tears to my eyes. Feelings of betrayal and loneliness rush as I start to think about my story.

I had a typical American upbringing. In the beginning, my family of four lived in a one-bedroom apartment while my father completed his PhD. I have vivid memories of my mother, twin sister, and I strolling hand-in-hand through the busy streets of San Francisco. With relentless perseverance, my father completed his PhD in record time and provided us with economic mobility. I later grew up juggling tennis and dance lessons with schoolwork and volunteering. On the weekends, we would buckle our helmets and bike to the closest park. We took road trips to the redwoods or coastline every chance we got. Simply put, my entire childhood is filled with memories of places and people that only exist in the United States.

My identity as an American was stripped from me when I was 18. While applying for colleges, I learned about what my parents' pending green card application meant for me. Unlike my American peers, I was not able to accept financial aid, work the jobs I was offered, and pursue financial freedom via building credit.

Nevertheless, I focused my hard work on completing my degree in bioengineering, volunteering in biomedical research labs, and leading national-level student organizations. My hard work did pay off — I was recognized for several awards, from UC San Diego and Genentech, for my

commitment to the undergraduate and scientific communities. I still pushed through the obstacles to pursue my version of the American Dream.

The obstacles became overbearing when even the opportunity to achieve the American Dream became a privilege for me. 10 months before I turned 21, I learned I would have to self-deport with an incomplete degree. Were all of my achievements futile? How do I leave the only place I call home? These thoughts consumed my mind for the next 6 months as I sacrificed my academic and leadership responsibilities to fight for a way to remain in this country. A huge weight was lifted off my shoulders when I received my change-of-status approval. I switched to an F-1 international student visa, the same status my father arrived with 13 years earlier.

Living as an international student has greatly impacted my career trajectory. I am eager to start my career in the pharmaceutical industry so I can solve technical challenges in drug development. Although I had more prestigious internships and laboratory experiences than my American peers, I was not able to find any biotechnology companies that were willing to sponsor me, let alone let me work on an OPT. I decided to pursue a PhD in biomedical engineering to improve my chances of future sponsorship and continue my legal status without acquiring more student loan debt. Unsurprisingly, I continued to face underserved discrimination as PhD programs also saw my international student status as a burden.

Today, I am awaiting the next stage of barriers that will arrive when I complete my PhD. The next few years are a sigh of relief, as my temporary student status is the most certainty I have had in my adult years. Like my father, I am completing my PhD in record time and am on track to

graduate with honors. I have a plan A, B, C, and D for what happens after my PhD, because I know stability is a privilege that I cannot acquire for a while.

Despite being forgotten by the American government, I still identify as an American. Because of the possibility of getting “stuck” if I visit my country of birth, my entire life has been in America since my family immigrated 17 years ago. Last year, I felt like a foreigner when I visited my country of birth for the first time since I was 10 (I am 25 now). My mind is always at a crossroads because I am considered a foreigner in the country I call home, and I feel like a foreigner in the country that is my “home” on paper. I have accepted this feeling as an inevitable part of pursuing my American Dream as I see no straightforward path to American citizenship.

I aged-out of the system, but I don’t want this trend to continue. I am one of over 200,000 Documented Dreamers in the same boat. Unfortunately, the root cause of the issue — the long wait-times for employment-based green cards and per-county limits — is only getting worse. My parents are still “waiting in the line,” and it’s been 5 years since I was kicked out of this so-called line. I strongly urge that the United States government take the necessary steps to decrease green card wait-times and end aging-out once and for all.

Vatsala Bajpai

America, the land of opportunities. The country millions of immigrants move to in order to succeed in life. My family was one of the millions of immigrant families who moved to the United States in order to lead a better life. I moved to the United States with my parents in 2005, when I was only 2 years old.

Growing up, I never thought of myself as “different”, I did everything my American friends did, whether that be playing tennis, or celebrating the 4th of July by the beach. Once I got to highschool, I was constantly reminded of how I was “different” than my friends. I couldn’t work a summer job because I didn’t have a work permit, I couldn’t vote, or even accept any scholarships that I was academically eligible for. Every three years me and my family face a period of uncertainty, not knowing if the application to extend our visa will be approved. The recurring question of “Why don’t you just apply for citizenship” always makes me upset because I wish it was that easy. With my 21st birthday not far away, my parents and I are now discussing whether I should switch to an international student visa (F-1). This would buy me a few more years of legal residency, but it would also massively inflate the cost of my education. If I make that switch, I’m also giving up my current shot at a green card; I can’t be an international student and also keep my place in the green card line at the same time. I see my friends leading a “normal” life, not worried about the possibility of having to move to a completely different country, restarting their lives, having a job, or being able to vote. In spite of living in the United States as long as they have, I am not able to do any of these things because

according to the law I am classified as an “alien”. Georgia is my home. This state has invested in my education, and it’s where I want to be.

The broken immigration system is currently affecting many immigrant families like mine, with the possibility of having to wait over 100 years just to get a green card. I want to use the opportunities that I have been given and give back to the country I call my home, the United States of America.

Maria Isabel Campos

My name is Maria Isabel Campos, and I am currently a second-year law student at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. This is my story and experiences as an immigrant in the United States. I, alongside thousands of young adults in the United States, am a Documented Dreamer.

In 2008, my parents wanted to provide my sister and me with the cultural and language experience of living in a different country. Thus, at the age of thirteen, my sister, my mom, and I moved to the United States with a student visa status. A year after, my father decided to join us, he opened his Mexican business in the United States, hired an immigration attorney, and applied for an L1 Visa at the United States Consulate in Nuevo Laredo. We were granted the L1/L2 visa and moved more permanently to Brownsville, Texas. I continued with my middle school education, graduated from High School, and was admitted to The University of Texas at Austin for my undergraduate.

As an undergraduate, I was dependent on my parents' L1 Visa. As a dependent of an L1 Visa, you are unable to work, even campus employment is not allowed. Therefore, it was very difficult to get any internship experience during my first two years of undergraduate. While I was in my undergrad, my parents hired an attorney to assist them with the application for a green card. The process extended after USCIS requested more evidence for the case, ultimately, USCIS denied our green card application and I turned 21 and aged out of the process. To maintain legal status in the United States, I had to change my status to a student visa, which placed me in the same

position in the immigration system as immigrants who had just entered the United States in recent years, although I had been residing in the United States for nine years.

As an F-1 student, I could at least work on campus, I decided to work at the International Office of The University of Texas at Austin to familiarize myself with the F-1 student immigration process. In my senior year of undergraduate, I began searching for jobs, I got several first and second-round interviews, even some job opportunities, but once I disclosed my immigration status, most of the employers rescinded their offers. I was discouraged with the process, living in the uncertainty of what the future would hold for me. Additionally, I was again disappointed with the United States immigration process. My mother, who at this point was already living in Mexico, went to the United States Consulate in Matamoros and without a single word, exchange was denied a tourist visa to come to my undergraduate graduation. My mother had been my rock all through my education, she was the first person I called when I needed emotional support, from Pre-K to High School, she made sure my lunch was packed, my clothes were clean, and my homework was completed. She was always there for me and the fact that she would not be able to see what we accomplished together was completely heartbreak for me and my family.

After I graduated from my undergrad, I worked for a year at an immigration firm assisting other immigrants. I have personally experienced the peaks and valleys of the immigration system on several occasions. I have firsthand experience with the reunification of new families, and the heartbreaking, and unfortunate denial of new dreams and aspirations due to complications of the proceedings. Although a difficult experience, the smiles I saw on the clients' faces once their immigration case had been approved was invaluable. However, at the same time I knew, that

although I could assist others in reaching the American dream, the American dream was in no near proximity for me.

After working for a year, I started law school at St. Mary's University School of Law. Law school had always been a dream of mine, my own immigration journey had inspired me to become an attorney, I knew I wanted to help others who are going through difficult and important moments in their lives. In 2020, mid-Covid-19 pandemic, I began my first year of law school. The pandemic brought great uncertainty, especially to international students. In July of 2020, I was on my way to visit my family in Mexico when I received some baffling news, international students doing online programs had to leave the United States. At that point, my law school, like many law schools around the nation, were uncertain whether they would proceed with in-person classes or virtually. I made the difficult decision to return to Mexico for a year with my family and take my first semester of law school completely remotely. I was told that USCIS would place my SEVIS account on hold, and I would be unaffected by the process.

After my first year of law school, my passion and dedication for the law reflected on my grades. I was offered a judicial internship position at the United States District Court of the Western District of Texas. I was very excited about the opportunity, but again my immigration status became a barrier. My law school informed me that to be granted Curriculum Practical Training to do an unpaid internship I had to, enroll full-time and pay for the internship. Although it was an expense that I wasn't planning on, I decided that I wanted the experience, and I would enroll in full-time classes while I did the internship. However, that was not the only hurdle I faced. SEVIS never reactivated my record and I had to postpone several consulate appointments to get my

student visa. I ended up having to apply for another SEVIS number and pay the fee again. Ultimately, I was able to do my internship and gain that experience. This summer I was offered a position as a summer associate for Locke Lord LLP. Although I am excited about the internship, I knew I had to overcome the immigration hurdles. To do my internship over the summer I had to talk to the dean of my school, enroll in an independent research study course, and ask a faculty member to supervise me.

My story is just one of many stories of thousands of Document dreamers who are in a similar position as I am. I learned from an early age what the American Dream meant: hard work gives you the freedom and ability to write your own future. I have worked hard, but my future is still decided by the United States immigration system.

My family was fortunate enough to have the resources necessary to come to the United States legally. We did everything by the book: my parents invested, paid taxes, opened a business, and maintained our immigration status for years. I have resided in the United States for more than 12 years, always maintaining legal status, currently in the top 10% of my class at St. Mary's University School of Law. Still, with the current immigration laws, it would be easier for me to get permanent residency by a marriage petition than by my hard work as a law student and my long-term documented immigration status.

I am fully convinced that the American Dream is still a possibility for me and the 200,000+ immigrants that are in the same situation.

I hope you consider this testimony for the upcoming immigration hearing. This would be the first time I would testify in front of the United States Senate. I am confident my legal training and extracurricular activities make me a qualified candidate to testify in front of the senate. I am currently a member of the National Mock Trial team in my law school, have competed in a moot court competition and an arbitration competition. Still, I want what is best for the Documented Dreamers and I am confident that the selection you make would be in the best interest of the organization.

Hwanhee (Hilary) Yoon

My name is Hwanhee (Hilary) Yoon. I'm seventeen years old, and I'm currently a junior in high school. *I am a Documented Dreamer.*

My parents brought me and my siblings to the United States from South Korea when I was just *10 months old*. Due to the lack of pathways to citizenship, I am still on a temporary visa though I have never left the U.S. since moving here almost 17 years ago. America is all I've ever known — I'm more comfortable speaking English than Korean, and because I was so young when I left Korea, I don't remember a single thing about the country. Everything that I know about Korea is what I've learned growing up here in the U.S.

My parents grew up in Korea and the reason they moved to the U.S. was because my dad's company had sponsored his Master's degree in Public Administration in the U.S. During my dad's three-year masters program, my parents realized that this is the place where they wanted to raise my siblings and me, since the education system in Korea is extremely stressful and competitive. My parents wanted us to be able to play sports, learn instruments, hangout with friends and have fun while growing up, rather than studying day and night everyday. However, my dad had an obligation to return to the company. Though it was a difficult decision, my mom decided to stay in the U.S. to raise us while my dad worked in Korea. As a result, our family reunited only once or twice a year for a few years until my dad eventually left his company and moved to the U.S. to be with us. My parents decided to start running a small business on an E-2 (investor) visa. They started with a small cafe in Portland, Oregon without any prior experience

in running a business. They gave up their jobs, left their family and friends, and took a chance at making a living here in the U.S. so that my siblings and I could have a better upbringing.

When I started kindergarten, I remember no one in my class could pronounce my name correctly. The first thing my family and I did was research English names so that my siblings and I would have an easier time while going through school. I remember always being embarrassed whenever someone asked me what my “real” name was, or when my parents would speak Korean to me in front of my friends. I wanted to be ‘normal’ and have the life that every American kid got to experience.

My parents gave me just that.

I was involved in almost all the activities and clubs that my elementary school offered — I ran track, I was in student council, I played in band, I sang in choir, and I was involved in volunteering opportunities. Outside of school I received piano lessons, I did figure skating and played on a basketball team. When I entered middle school I was involved in school leadership, played volleyball, basketball, ran track, and was a member of the National Honor Society. I am now in high school, and I am still involved in leadership, National Honor Society, had the privilege of being the President of Key Club and will be Associated Student Body (ASB) President next year. I have also been on varsity basketball and golf teams since freshman year. Through all these activities my parents were there, giving me rides, coming to my games and matches, all the while supporting my two siblings and running their business.

Growing up, I've seen my whole family struggle due to the lack of permanent residency in America. I can remember my parents working tirelessly in fear of being denied a renewal of their E-2 visa which could result in losing the residency status for our entire family. I remember my sister crying due to the limitations she faced as a student when deciding on a major to pursue and jobs to apply for, only to find out that numerous companies only consider applicants that are green card holders or U.S. citizens. I remember my brother who left the U.S. when his visa expired.

I also remember the numerous conversations my parents had with me, explaining that we might have to leave America and that everything would be okay no matter what happened. They assured me they would figure out a way for me to stay in the U.S. I watch my parents act fine, when I know how much it hurts them to see everything that my siblings and I have to go through. They watch us cry about the uncertainty the future holds, but act strong for us, even when they haven't seen their parents and siblings for over 12 years. My grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and my grandfather with Parkinson's disease, but my parents have not had a chance to go to Korea to be with them all because of me — they do not want to jeopardize losing the E-2 visa status because that would mean that I would have to move out of the only country I call *home*.

Now that I will be applying to colleges in less than a year, I am fearful of what I will be facing. I always planned on attending college, but now I realize that whether or not I could go to college solely depends on whether my parents could afford expensive international student college tuition. To help me pursue higher education, my parents would not only be sacrificing their

financial security, but also the time they could spend tending to my grandparents in their old age and poor health. If it weren't for me, my parents would not have to worry about these things.

My family and I feel American and I grew up just like our American neighbors around us. We only wish that we could also have the same opportunities as them.

Summer Rusher

In the spring of 2000, not long after I turned a year old, my young and ambitious parents moved to Englewood, Florida from Ludgershall, England. My parents were granted an E2 visa in order for my dad to own and operate a property management company.

As an E2 dependent, I grew up in Englewood, Florida. I went through all American schooling, volunteered in my local community, played school and club sports, and created impactful relationships with friends and community members.

After high school, I earned an academic and athletic scholarship to attend Southeastern University. At SEU I enrolled in a 4+1 Exceptional Student Education undergraduate and master's combination program and began my collegiate soccer career. Throughout college I also attended a local church, volunteered in my church nursery, volunteered in outreach events with my soccer team, coached youth soccer, and created meaningful relationships with friends and community members.

I turned 21 at the end of my Junior year, meaning I could no longer be an E2 dependent. I had to leave the only place I knew and go back to my home country. I had to leave my family, friends, and unfinished college degree to go to a country where I only spent the first year of my life, searching for a way to come home again.

I am very fortunate to have obtained an F1 student visa in the summer of 2020. I have been temporarily reunited with my family and friends and am also continuing my academic and athletic collegiate career.

Although I am currently back in the United States, my future here is not promised. In the summer of 2021 I applied for OPT, Optional Practical Training. I was granted this visa extension and secured a job at Grace Lutheran School in Winter Haven, Florida. I have spent the last 7 months teaching 5th grade. I love my job. I love pouring into the next generation.

There continues to be so many uncertainties in my life as my visa expires this summer and there are very limited opportunities available that would allow me to continue to live in the United States.

I want to dream, but I need Congress' help.

Lakshmi Parvathinathan

Most American teenagers look forward to turning 21, but I dread it. I am American in every way except on paper and turning 21 means that I will age-out of the system and have to fight to stay in this country, a country that has become home to me.

My name is Lakshmi Parvathinathan and I am a Documented Dreamer. I have been living in the U.S. for nearly fourteen years now but my future here is not guaranteed. I may be forced to self-deport in two years.

I was born in Tamil Nadu, India and my parents brought me to Dallas, Texas when I was just three years old. I didn't know it at the time, but Dallas would be home only for the next five years — how long our L1B visas would be valid. I grew up 25 minutes away from the Cowboys Stadium and I cherished the sweltering summers and merciful winters that came with Texas. I went to school in Dallas from pre-k to third grade, but three months into third grade I was torn away from everything I ever knew. Our L1A visa extension got denied. I had a week to tell my friends and teachers that I was moving halfway across the world to a country that I didn't remember.

For the next two years in India, I somehow managed to feel like a foreigner in the very country I was born in. During my first six months there, I spent hours after school every day with a tutor learning how to read and write Tamil, a language with 247 characters, just to pass the third grade. At school, I faked an Indian accent and smiled awkwardly when my friends praised me for my

“perfect” English. While adjusting to life in India was hard, it was much harder to live 10 hours away from my dad. His new job put him in a city far from my mom and I, only allowing for visits every other month. Seeing all the other kids come to the bus stop with their dads in the morning made me long for mine.

When fifth grade rolled around, so did my chance to come back to America. This time, home was the suburbs of Philadelphia. Now that I was older, my parents decided to be transparent about our visa status. When I started middle school, they warned me that our L1B visa would only allow us to stay for five years, which meant that I might have to move back to India again during high school. But they told me there was a chance that we could stay longer if we won a lottery: the H1B lottery. I didn’t understand why our fate came down to luck.

On top of angsty tween drama, my middle school experience was plagued with constant uncertainty. The odds were not in our favor the first time we applied — we were met with a rejection. Our second application resulted in the same fate. The fear of being forced to leave this country again began to petrify me and I started losing hope about my future in America. Facing rejection repeatedly was enervating, but my parents refused to relent and tried again. As a final attempt, we applied one more time. This time, the odds were in our favor and we won the H1B lottery when I was in the ninth grade. I thought this meant that my future in this country was secured. I thought this meant that my family would finally have some peace and stability. I could not have been more wrong.

By the next year, my parents slowly began to tell me what being on a H4 dependent visa actually meant. I learned about all the disheartening limitations that came with my status: I don't qualify for federal aid, in-state tuition, or most scholarships, I don't have work authorization, and I can't easily pursue a career in healthcare. Finding out that I would be considered an international student when applying to colleges and medical schools completely invalidated the past decade and a half of my life. Similarly, finding out that I can't do internships or have simple jobs not only made me worry about my professional goals but also about the unaffordability of hefty international student tuition. Worst of all, I found out that I might face self-deportation when I turn 21. Self-deportation proved to be such a frightening concept to a teenage girl who only wanted stability for once in her life. I learned that the only way I could potentially avoid self-deportation was by switching to a student visa, getting lucky enough to be sponsored by an employer, win the H1b lottery, and start the entire employment-based green card process on my own. Additionally, even switching to a student visa, which most Documented Dreamers would attempt at age 21, is difficult because of the requirement to show "nonimmigrant intent" and ties to our country of birth. My enthusiasm for my future quickly turned into fear and despondent thoughts consumed me, causing me to constantly feel powerless. I used to think that if I worked hard, I could be anything I want to be, but I started to question that. The American Dream that I had spent all these years in school learning about seemed like a lie.

Growing up in a community with few immigrants, the lack of a solid support system made me feel incredibly alienated. No one I knew could understand what I was going through and I couldn't bring myself to openly talk about my situation because I felt emotionally drained. I just wanted to be able to excitedly talk about college and the future the same way my peers could, but

that seemed like too much to ask for. However, through it all, my parents have been my biggest supporters. They have sacrificed so much for me, and have missed so many weddings, funerals, and births over the past fourteen years just so I could have the best opportunity to fulfill my dreams. They're both first-generation immigrants who have gone years at a time without seeing their families, and I am eternally grateful for all they do. Their unwavering optimism about my future is why I refuse to let my status define me and it is the reason I have not given up yet.

I am now almost 19 and a Biological Sciences major at Drexel University, still working to chase my dream of entering the medical field. Time seems to be moving very slow but also very fast. Every long day that passes where no administrative action is taken to protect Documented Dreamers, I become one day closer to aging out of the system. I recently joined Improve The Dream, and for the first time ever, I feel like there is finally light at the end of the tunnel for Dreamers like me. Five years ago, I never would have thought that such a movement could exist. Since joining Improve The Dream, I have been actively working alongside other Documented Dreamers to ensure that no child has to face self-deportation ever again. Our experiences have been overlooked and our voices have gone unheard for far too long now. We are Dreamers too, and we just want to be given a real chance to chase our American Dream.

Padma Dantury

My name is Padma, I'm 18 years old and I'm a senior in high school. When I was 8 months old, I took a life changing flight from Mumbai, India to the Boston Airport. This was my first flight ever, and it was the beginning of my life in America — the only life I've ever known.

Growing up, I always saw myself as every other American. My friends and I played in our backyards together, learned in the same classrooms, and our parents were friends. I grew up speaking English, playing on a local girl's soccer team, dressing up Barbie dolls, and enjoying fast food.

My favorite activity of all time, though, was visiting an arcade called Putt Putt Fun House in Houston, Texas, with my dad. I loved to rock climb, play laser tag, and play Deal or No Deal at the arcade. In the 2nd grade, I decided to have my 8th birthday party there, and I invited every single person in my class. I relished being with my closest friends in the place that I loved, and had some of my fondest memories with them. I had found my people, after years of being a shy kid.

Another frequent activity of mine was playing house with my friends during recess. Whatever I was — the mother, the child, the secret agent — I imagined my life 20 years from then, living in the US. I thought we were all in the same boat, as Americans.

When I was in middle school, we visited Canada. I thought we were going on a small vacation, until I came to understand that we needed to visit the American Embassy in Ottawa, in order to get our multiple entry visa. I was confused, but they told me we needed to go there in order to come back home in the US. It was then that my parents explained that I'm not like every other American. As an Indian immigrant, I remained on an H-4 visa dependent on my mom's work permit, even though we applied for permanent residency in 2013. I realized living on an H-4 visa, waiting in an endless line for a Green Card, has major drawbacks. Every three years, I have to file for an extension for our visa, despite the fact that I've lived here for 18 years. Each time is anxiety-inducing for me and my family, as we never know if we will be denied and sent back "home." This was particularly scary for me because I had no memory of India, yet it is technically considered my place of permanent residence.

Throughout high school, I've tried to embrace the American culture that I've grown up with. I joined my school's marching band, and at every home football game, I proudly play "The Star Spangled Banner" on my saxophone with the rest of my American friends. I work hard in school, and do what I can to volunteer and give back to my community. However, I learned that I can't work, get a normal driver's license, or accept most scholarships for college. Worst of all, I could be deported at age 21 if I don't switch to another visa and start the immigration process all over. Even if I do switch to a student visa in college, I would be considered an international student, and my entire existence growing up in America wouldn't matter or be accounted for.

My best friends talk excitedly about gaining work experience on campus, earning money over the summer, and even voting. I can't do any of these things, despite us having many of the same

experiences in America. I recently committed to studying at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and I look forward to majoring in neuroscience, and becoming a scientific researcher, but I'm scared. I don't want to leave what I consider to be my nation.

I hope one day I can truly call the only country I've ever known "home."

Jorge

My name is Jorge and I am American in every way, except on paper. I am also a dreamer, with the exception that my legal status says otherwise. My story in this wonderful country began in 2002, when my parents, under an E2 visa, decided to move to America from Colombia in hopes of providing my brother and I a better future. Here in America I walked home from Omni middle school every day, I went to prom in Spanish River High School, and I met my best friends throughout these 20 years. However, despite my complete cultural assimilation, I could not be more detached from American citizenship.

Children like me, who are brought here on certain long-term visas, have a race against time to get their green cards before they turn 21, or they face significantly reducing their chances to stay in this country. I lost that race, and when I turned 21, I had to become an international student overnight, as I was no longer allowed to fall under my parents' visa. I attended Emory University's Goizueta Business School under a full-tuition academic scholarship, so I was hopeful that despite this immigration setback, I would be able to compete for the limited H1B visa slots with other international students. Unfortunately, I did not make the entirely random lottery system, so today I find myself on my third degree, still fighting to remain home.

Even though I met the main provisions for DACA, I was not able to qualify for protection and also did not receive a work permit. Additionally, I have to pay extremely expensive international student tuition. Due to the huge economical strain of my situation, I only have one year left here as I cannot continue to afford to pay for degrees that I do not need. One year from now, I will need to "self-deport." I will be kicked out by the system.

I hope that all children who grew up here, both undocumented and documented are granted the opportunity to remain in our home country.

Sanjana

When I was younger, I thought it was unfair that I could not live with my parents. I didn't understand why, as I was only four or five, but I thought it was unfair. Over the next year and a half, I forgot about my parents anyway, so it didn't matter. Once my visa was approved, my mother came back from the States to pick me up. It's actually one of my first memories, walking into my aunt's tiny apartment, slowly raising my eyes to see my mother having a drink on the couch facing the door. When I walked in, she put her cup down on the floor, and opened her arms, looking for a hug. I hid behind my grandmother. Me and my mother are fine now, and she rationalizes this event because it was all worth it. We are in the land of opportunity.

The next few years of my life were spent on long car rides and behind moving trucks, watching the northeastern scenery through the car window. When I was younger, my parents couldn't live together, and I didn't understand why. It didn't matter, I just moved from school to school, waiting for the next move. Now, me, my mom, and my dad live together in Alabama, and we are pretty happy. My parents rationalize a tumultuous decade because it was apparently all worth it. Again, we are in the land of opportunity.

The summer before sophomore year, I wanted a job. I was fourteen, and the only place that I knew hired was Publix. My dad drove me there, and I waited for an hour behind a tall lanky kid at the kiosk. I got to the social security question, I called my dad, and he said I didn't have one. The car ride back home, I reached an understanding about my immigration status. That, I am, in fact documented, but I do not have any privileges of those who have permanent residency status or citizenship. This, of course, meant I could not get a job. Now, I know it means that I don't

qualify for most scholarships, paid internships, and in-state intuition is iffy. Getting a driver's permit was a year-long effort because of my previously mentioned lack of a social security number. Actually, I didn't understand all of this on that car ride, but with plenty of time to reflect, I understand that my financial independence, security, and my place in this country are not protected.

When I ask my mother why she moved to the States, leaving her family behind, she just replies that she wanted more freedom and opportunities for me. But all of those opportunities seem distant, and my time here seems limited. Actually, those opportunities are distant, and my time here is limited. My parents might get a green card by the time I turn 21, or I will age-out. All I'm looking for is security. All my life, that seemed like it was too much to ask.

I hope this country will treat all children, documented or undocumented, who grew up here equally, and will give them the opportunities that they deserve as Americans.

Mannie

My name is Mannie. I'm 27 years old and I am a documented dreamer. My American story began when I moved to the United States in 2007 at 14 years old. My father decided to move my family from Zambia to America because he wanted to pursue a doctoral degree and to have the best educational opportunity for my whole family under the F1 visa program.

I had the typical American high school experience while making lifelong friends as I assimilated into the American culture. After graduating high school with my friends, reality kicked in as I realized the obstacles I had in my future for me to continue my education and live in the United States. As a dependent of an F1 visa holder, I could not go to university or have any work authorization unless I converted to an F1 visa as well. With international students charged double to attend college, it took my family a couple of years to finally be able to convert to an F1 visa and start my higher education. I attended West Texas A&M University where I graduated with a business degree and the hope of getting a work visa. I was unsuccessful in my pursuit of a work visa due to the limited time I had to work and the competitiveness of the h1b program. To stay legal in the country that had been my home for 12 years, I had to go back to school or face self-deportation. I completed my MBA degree in 2020. I'm now back in the same situation of trying to find a company willing to sponsor a work visa for me to continue my American life. A year from now, I again face the possibility of self deporting from what has been my home for the last 14 years.

Had I lost legal status in 2012, I would qualify for DACA provisions as I meet every other requirement for the status. I do not see myself any different from someone under DACA status as

we were all brought here as children by our parents. I may not be American on paper, but I feel American.

Sanjana

When I was younger, my family moved around a lot. Every time my parents told me that we were moving, I would get very anxious and upset because I had to start all over- new environment, new friends, new everything. But, when I was eight years old, we finally settled down in one place, the US. Over time, I felt comfortable here and even began to call this place my home.

Soon, I started to unconsciously speak with an American accent, eat American food, and enjoy American television. I assimilated to the point that I considered myself a part of this country. It was only in middle school that I learned that this was actually not the case; I was only here on a H-4 dependent visa. But, it was in high school when I realized the true consequences of this. During this time, I excelled both in academia and extracurricular activities. I was valedictorian, National Merit Semifinalist, and President of Key Club to name a few. However, I was limited by my visa status as a National Merit Finalist because I am not a US citizen. I had to apply to college as an international student though I have lived in this country since I was a child. Regardless of my high GPA and competitive test scores, I could not apply to many scholarships.

However, I did not let that stop me. I began college majoring in biomedical engineering with hopes of going to medical school. I knew that the possibilities of international students getting into a US medical school is low, but that did not deter me from my goals. I continued to work hard by maintaining a 4.0 GPA and volunteering in healthcare settings. However, I am still facing the consequences of my visa status. Applying to medical school is already an incredibly

tough process, and it has been even more so for me. Though I have a complete and diverse application, I have not heard back from any of the numerous schools I have applied to.

As a senior in college, I have already aged out. I switched to a F1 visa before my sophomore year of college, but that means I can only stay in the US to study. I cannot imagine leaving the country I have come to call my home to go to a country that I have only visited a few times over the years. Now, to stay in this country, I have to get a job, switch to a H-1B visa, and start the process my parents started 14 years ago all over again.

I feel it is unfair that many people in similar situations are forced to self-deport from the only place we have called home or have to live in constant worry of maintaining our visa status. Please help people like me have a clear path to citizenship.

Vanessa

I am an immigrant. I may not "look like one", whatever that may mean, and I may not sound like one, and it may not be permanent according to my visa, but I consider myself to be an immigrant. I was born in Como, Italy and lived in a small town called Merate until I was 15 years old. In that time I also lived in Rijeka, Croatia for two years. For the past 9 years, however we've been living in America. Nine years. In the grand scheme of things 9 years isn't that much time, but thinking back at my life then and my life now, it could not be any more different. For one, I left Italy with three sisters, and three years later we welcomed a little (American) brother. Our life changed in 2012 when, after years of work, restless nights, meetings with lawyers and thousands of dollars, my mom was granted a five year E-2 visa. I couldn't be more excited; I would finally live in America and my life would be as glamorous as all those coming of age movies I had grown up watching on TV.

Little did I know that as the child of the visa holder, things would get complicated and my rights very limited. As a teenager none of it seemed like a big deal but it started becoming more and more of an issue when I got into college, which my parents had to pay for out of their pockets since I was not eligible for any type of financial aid. I had to turn down jobs that not only would have helped me financially, but would have helped my career prospects because I am ineligible to work and don't have a social security number.

Despite everything, I still felt fortunate enough to live in the US, the land of opportunities where dreams come true if you are willing to work hard enough. And boy, were we working hard. My

parents hassled day and night trying to grow their business while supporting their family and I worked tirelessly in college trying to keep my grades high so I could get scholarships, and build on my resume. Well five years flew, and soon our visa expired. Because my parents' business wasn't financially strong enough, our immigration lawyer suggested we wait to renew it and simply get an extension of our I-94 document, which is the arrival-departure record card used by US Customs and Border Protection to keep track of non permanent residents and noncitizens exiting and entering the country, and is valid for two years. Since our visa was expired and we only had the I-94, we were not allowed to leave the country for that time.

It was not the end of the world that I couldn't go back to visit Italy for a couple of years or take a weekend trip to Canada. It does not end here. My junior year in college, while still here with the I-94, I turned 21. According to US law, it means that I'm an adult or, "no longer dependent" on the visa holder aka my mom. This means that according to the law, children of visa holders are expected to return back to their country, leave their family behind and figure out life on their own. Thanks to the I-94, however, I was able to finish college. As a matter of fact, I graduated in May 2019 summa cum laude. I worked hard, and have two degrees to show for it; a BFA in Dance and a BS in Video Production. Senior year was challenging, On top of my classes, rehearsals, extra-curriculars, work and trying to make a plan for my life post-graduation, I also had to worry about whether or not I could stay in the US. I talked to lawyers and the only advice they had for me was to go to grad school or get married; neither of these options fit my plans or aspirations for my immediate future. I want to dance, travel, perform and do so much more, but my visa status doesn't allow for any of it. I thought about switching to a student visa while completing my last year of college so that I could then apply for the OPT, but because I came up

with this idea too late, it would have been too risky. So I decided to enroll in a post graduation dance program at Peridance in NYC with an F-1 visa instead. Before I knew it, my program ended and in December 2020, I received a certificate with high honors. While in New York I tried to make contacts, apply to jobs that would sponsor an H1B visa, scouring to find a way to get a career going in the US. However, it became clear that the nature of my artistic degrees, along with Trump's strict immigration policy would have made it impossible for me to stay.

So now I'm preparing to depart the US. My grace period is up in a month, but due to the pandemic I filed for a change of status so I can stay with my family while I look for work abroad. I hope to be able to find my way back eventually. I hope I can make a life for myself here. This is my home. My family and friends are here and I can't imagine being anywhere else. But for now, I have to say goodbye.

Ayaan Siddiqui

My name is Ayaan Siddiqui, and I am an American. People may say it cannot be the case. But in reality, I am. The floor I walk on is American. The walls I touch are American. The trees that have given me ample shade all my life are American. Those neighbors and friends that I hold so dear to my heart, that have made me into the individual I am today, all call themselves American. I have lived my life as an American.

But in 4 years, I won't be.

In 4 years, I will be 21.

This is my unique story. The story that tells of a boy who lives in one world, but is told that he is from another. Everytime I come back home from a trip and get asked "What is the purpose of your visit?" by my fellow American, a page of the story is written. Everytime I have to renew my visa to stay in the country as if it's like paying off a recurring debt, a page is written. Everytime I talk to my parents about the future of my life as if it's the backwards, medieval story of an exile being banished from the land of his belonging, a page is written. And ultimately, these pages compile into a tragedy. I don't want my life to be a tragedy. I'm seventeen. I just got my braces off. I don't want my life to be a tragedy. And I won't let it be.

I immigrated to the United States at 18 months old. All I can remember is America. As a UNICEF Youth Advocate, I fight for all children who feel as if they don't have a place to call home. I fight for all children who seek greater opportunity. I fight for all children's rights because they are an extension of my own. I know what it's like to feel helpless as a problem much larger than you looms over your head like an anchor does to the fish at the seafloor. I know the stress and struggle that children feel whilst living in an adult world. For me, children's rights are the embodiment of children's empowerment. In my fight for children, I have to become more globally-minded and civically engaged. Because if I don't, I risk staying that way: *a Dreamer*.

Across all generations, there is an overwhelming understanding: that we are a nation like none other, a nation of immigrants who like to be loud and like to be heard. Our patriotism is serving this country by calling out its unspeakables, and broadcasting its unseeables. Our ability to debate and question is our patriotic duty. Citizenship in America is not just seeing where America is, but rather where America could be in the future—that “City Upon a Hill” that John Winthrop envisioned so long ago. Citizenship is why the founders dreamed of not just *a perfect* union but rather a *more perfect* union. One day I hope to be recognized as an American citizen—but until that day comes—I will continue to fight, continue to dream.

Tanuj Solanki

My name is Tanuj Solanki, I am a Graduate Student at the University of Central Florida, studying Mechanical Engineering with a focus in Thermofluids. I am also a proud American; the United States is my home.

I have lived in this country since 2004, when I was 4 years old. I have fleeting memories of my life from before my parents and I shifted to the United States from India. My parents often reminisce about those times as if talking about a different lifetime. Since I moved here, not only have I not returned to India, but I have not even left the country. I was an H4 dependent under my mother, who worked under a work visa while financially supporting our family.

The United States, without question, is my home. I have lived and learned in this country for basically my entire life. We first moved to Jersey City, New Jersey, living with my aunt while my parents and I settled into our new lives. I attended Preschool and Elementary school there, and we later moved to West Palm Beach, Florida in 2010. I attended Suncoast High School, which offered AP Courses and Dual Enrollment Classes, which allowed me to earn college credit. I started college at UCF in 2018, and I was able to complete my Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering in 2 and a half years, before I turned 21 and aged out of my mother's Work Visa. I had to later transition to a International Student Visa to continue my education, even though I had lived the past 17 years of my life continuously in this country.

My family and I have spent 100% of our time in the United States as documented immigrants, and I have never been undocumented. Back in 2012, I remember learning about DACA, and being disappointed to be left out only due to having maintained a documented status.. I am looking forward to advocating with our Improve The Dream, to allow all Dreamers, both Documented and Undocumented, to live out the lives we have all dreamed of living.

Shristi Sharma

I have been raised in a country I love, but it does not claim me as its own. When I was five, my parents packed our bags and took a giant leap of faith to move our family from India to the United States; they wanted my baby sister and I to grow up in a place where our opportunities would not be limited by our gender. After the initial struggle of obtaining a visa to travel to America, the process only became more gruesome as we attempted to start a life here.

As a kid, I was spared from the details of our status and the constant work required to renew our visas and stay legal. I learned to read English at the public library, sled down Iowa's rolling plains every time it snowed, partook in every community event, started clubs for my town, celebrated 4th of July, and contributed to every school extracurricular I could possibly join. I sang American songs, road-tripped American places, learnt American history, and adopted American values. Slowly but surely, I became equal parts American as I was Indian.

It was only when I was offered a selective internship as a middle schooler that I found out I was different from my friends. My dad finally sat me down and gave me "The Talk" --not the one you expect for a middle schooler, but the one you get as a Documented Dreamer. It turned out, I was not American. I am not even a permanent resident of the country from where I have completed my entire kindergarten through 12th grade education. Because of our broken immigration system, although I have lived in the U.S. as a legal immigrant for the past thirteen years, I am treated as an international student, cannot earn money, am not eligible for financial aid, cannot

leave the country with a guarantee of returning, and face constant instability and fear of deportation.

Since then, my status has weaved its way into every thought; every action I take is weighed down by the burden of my limitations in this land of opportunities. Although I am incredibly fortunate to receive a full ride to Duke University and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill as a Robertson Scholar, I am not sure I will even be able to finish my higher education. As I near my 21st birthday, I face self-deportation and the prospect of leaving behind the only home I've ever known. Right now, as I wait in the decades-long backlog for a green card, The Children Act is my only hope for a secure future. Congress, I implore you to provide Documented Dreamers a path to citizenship. We are Americans too.

Jessica Ahluwalia

My name is Jessica, I am 20 years old, and I am a senior at the University of Iowa. I am majoring in Psychology and minoring in Rehabilitation Counselor Education. I was born in Toronto, Canada, and moved to a small town in Iowa when I was 11 years old- I had just finished the 5th grade. My family and I had no idea the immigration challenges that were awaiting us in the future. Currently I am supported as a H4- dependent of H1-B visa holders, which will expire in a few months when I age out. Throughout my life this set me apart from my classmates, but the only differentiation I felt was legality status on paper. It wasn't hard for me to assimilate to American culture, and I truly felt American- after all the states have been my home for about half of my life now.

Currently, my parents have no idea when we will get our green card, as we have been waiting for almost 10 years. We have come to accept it as an endless waiting, and every 3 years we apply for an extension on our visa, and every time we risk rejection resulting in deportation. The limitations the visa status holds for me have been very challenging, since I am not a citizen I have not been eligible for financial aid, various scholarships, loans, etc. One of the biggest challenges I have faced is not being able to legally work, which has placed limitations in regards to experiences and applying for jobs. My family and I have had to make many tough decisions based on my aging out, it is stressful and worrying to have to think about being forced to leave my family, friends, coworkers, and the states I call home.

It is unfair that many of us have to worry about deportation when we turn 21, despite living here for most of our lives. In order for me to stay in America I will have to switch to a student visa until I finish my education, then apply for a work visa- I would have to restart the entire process my parents went through over again. Despite this restart in process, I am still not guaranteed citizenship. I truly believe there should be a path to citizenship for children who grew up in America, and hope one day we won't have to live in constant worry and fear of leaving the country we all call home.

Srishti Dube

I moved to the United States when I was 10 years old with my mom and my brother, finally reuniting with my dad. They made this choice to present my younger brother and I with an opportunity for a better and larger future. Every day, my parents, my extended family in India, friends, and everyone else around me told me to dream big. I could be anything and everything I wanted to be and more. It wasn't until high school that I realized exactly how many limitations come with my H-4 Dependent Visa status. The American Dream that I knew of before entering the United States didn't apply to me all along.

I was a normal high school student growing up in Illinois. Like my peers on the pre-medicine track, I wanted to work at special needs summer camps, internships, and research mentorship programs. However, due to my visa status, I could not apply to most of these opportunities. My very first semester at college, after having gone through the entire two month training process, I was turned away from a cutting-edge Neuroscience Lab because I am not a permanent resident or citizen. As a result, I have been completely dependent on my parents without being able to contribute financially towards my education.

Even after 10 years of living in the United States, when looking at scholarships and programs for a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, the first thing I check for is: "Must be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States." That's what my life is. In my heart, I'm an Indian American woman who has big dreams, but my visa status prohibits me from embracing and realizing my

true potential. It prohibits me from taking advantage of the endless opportunities and experiences that the United States has to offer. Where is my American Dream?

Adhithya Rajasekaran

First, I want to convey my sincere gratitude to the people of this beautiful country for providing me and my family with safe refuge and incredible opportunities. The United States has always been a country of immigrants. But the immigration system has unfortunately not kept up with the times and needs serious reform. One immigration issue that is close to my heart is the struggles of Documented Dreamers in this country. I am one of them and this is my story.

I was born in Chennai, India. I come from a poor family of priests. We sustained our day-to-day lives from the donations devotees offered to the temple. My mom grew up in abject poverty. But she had enormous willpower and perseverance. She taught herself English by reading old English newspapers, studied day and night and was able to get admission to a top college. She went on to get two PhDs (one in chemistry and one in education) and she is one of the smartest people that I have ever known in my life. She has been a science educator for more than 30 years. She has several peer-reviewed publications and has helped lots of women get PhDs as a guide.

In 2004, my mom was recruited to come and teach in the United States. She eventually got a permanent teaching job in 2007 and got an H1B visa. She brought my sister and I to the US on H4 dependent children visas. That is how I came to the US. Our family eventually settled in Covington, Georgia where my sister and I enrolled in school.

When I came to the US, I did not speak English well. English is my third language. So, I was placed in the ESOL program. I did even know the words “visa”, “immigration”, “H1B”, “green card” or any of the other terms that I use in this testimony. With the help of amazing teachers and

exceedingly kind and empathetic American friends, I was eventually able to speak English fluently and I eventually went on to study and pass the AP British Literature exam and get college credit for it. I was a good student. I took AP classes. I was eventually inducted into the National Honors Society. Service to others was always emphasized to me even as a little child. So, I joined the Beta club and volunteered every weekend. I was also part of the team that won the Georgia Academic Bowl Championship in 2011. The Georgia state legislature decided to honor our team by passing a resolution and I have a signed copy from the governor, and it is one of my proudest possessions.

My mom's employer sponsored her for permanent residence in 2010 under the employment-based immigration system. But because my mom had the misfortune of being born in India, she was subject to the per country cap of 7% and was unable to receive permanent residency. She has been stuck in the backlog ever since. We have family friends who were born in countries other than India. Many of them came to the US around the same time as my mom or later and almost all of them are US citizens and they have voted in at least two if not three presidential elections. But my mom has been unable to even receive her green card.

The first time I learnt that I was not like my American friends is when I went to get my learner's permit. My American friend was getting his and his mom took me with him. My application was denied, and I was told that I had to produce additional documents because I was an "alien". I eventually came to know that my stay in this country was limited, and I could not do a lot of things that my American friends could do like take summer jobs.

I graduated in the top 10 of my graduating class. I have been dreaming of becoming an engineer ever since I was a little kid. Georgia Tech was my top choice as it was one of the best

engineering schools in the entire country and it was in my backyard. They also offered automatic admission to students who graduate in the top 10 from any Georgia school. But I soon realized I would not be able to afford Georgia Tech because of my immigration status.

Even though I was a resident of the state of Georgia, I had a driver's license issued by the state, I had graduated from a Georgia high school and my mom worked for a public educational institution in Georgia, I was still classified as an out of state student. This meant that I had to pay out of state tuition, which was closer to \$50,000 for a single year. Putting one kid through college is already hard enough for most American families. Putting two kids through college and paying out of state tuition was not possible for my family. I distinctly remember sitting outside of the Georgia Tech registrar's office crying and not knowing what to do next.

My helpful high school counselor told me to fill out the FAFSA form because she had seen other children from poor families get money from the federal government. But because of my immigration status, I did not qualify for any federal student aid like Pell grants or student loans. I went to apply for a private student loan from a bank. The bank asked for my social security number (SSN) and I had none because H4 children are not work authorized in the US and are not provided with SSNs. I also didn't qualify for any state scholarships like the merit-based Hope or Zell Miller scholarship that the state of Georgia provided to students because of my immigration status.

A close friend of mine who knew my struggles was enlisting in the US army. He put me in touch with a recruiter for the US army. The US army had a shortage of translators for certain languages, and they had a shortage of translators who can translate Tamil, my native language. The recruiter mentioned that if I joined the US army as a translator, I could receive US

citizenship and receive the GI bill to pay for college through the MAVNI program. I wanted to join. But due to a pre-existing medical condition, I eventually received a permanent disqualifier from ever enlisting in US military service.

Eventually, I decided to go to a community college called Georgia Perimeter College (now part of Georgia State University). My mom scrapped every bit of money she had to provide for my community college tuition. They did not have an engineering program at that time. So, I decided to study Mathematics. I continued my volunteer work every weekend. I was inducted into the honors program, rose to the leadership of several different clubs, and led delegations to Washington D.C on a wide variety of issues. I ran for the student government and became the vice president. I graduated in 2013 with an A.A degree in Mathematics with honors. I wanted to transfer back to Georgia Tech to get my engineering degree. But I still did not have money to pay for out-of-state tuition.

While I was at Georgia Perimeter College, the Obama administration came out with the DACA program. I am in full support of the DACA program. I have friends in the DACA community, and I personally know how much the program has transformed their lives. I am very thankful that the administration came out with the DACA program. But the administration included a requirement that individuals should have “no lawful status on June 15, 2012” to qualify. Since my mom renewed my visa and kept my lawful status on that date, I and others in my situation did not qualify. This meant that we did not have any protections from deportation like those in the DACA program had.

In April 2013, my life changed forever. A private foundation in Washington D.C named the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation named me as a scholar. They told me that I can go study whatever I

want in whichever college I want, and they would cover the cost. With the financial backing of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, I was finally able to get to Georgia Tech. I thought I had conquered all the problems. But little did I know that my troubles because of my status were just beginning.

Since scholarships are considered taxable, Georgia Tech reported my “income” to the IRS. But I couldn’t file taxes on my own as I didn’t have a SSN. So, I was forced to add all my “income” to my mom’s income and file taxes through her. This resulted in her income doubling immediately and resulting in huge tax bills for her.

Georgia Tech is a world class research university. I wanted to get involved in research. But since I had no work authorization, I could not work as a research assistant. Georgia Tech also had a startup incubator where students can join and start companies. I wanted to start my own company based on a research project that I had done for a class. But I could not do it.

In early 2015, my mom was in a bad car accident. She injured her neck and spinal cord and was in a serious condition. Doctors were asking who her next of kin is and who can make medical decisions about her life. That is when I came to the realization that my status in this country was tied to my mom and if something happened to her, I would not only be losing my mom, but I would also be deported out of this country and lose everything that I have worked hard for all this time. My mom is a fighter. She eventually recovered. But she is unable to drive today.

H4 visas cannot be extended past age 21. But I did not have enough credits to graduate before I turned 21. So, I started exploring other options. F1 (student visa) was the only option that allowed me to study. But F1 visas have a requirement that the applicant must have a residence abroad that he/she has no intention of abandoning. Since my entire family had moved to the US

and my mom had a permanent job in the US, we had no residence abroad. I talked to immigration lawyers, and they told me that I do not qualify for F1. But I wanted to study. So, I self-filed my F1 application as no immigration lawyers were willing to take my case that they knew was going to end up in denial. I did not hear back from USCIS for months. I was super fortunate. My application was eventually approved. But many others are not that fortunate, and they must self-deport themselves out of this country.

I graduated from Georgia Tech in December 2015 with a B.S in Electrical Engineering with highest honors. My mom had two PhDs. I wanted to get at least one PhD. I was immediately admitted to graduate school at Georgia Tech and the Jack Kent Cooke foundation once again offered me their full financial support until I got my PhD. But my mom's health was in decline. So, I decided to put my PhD dreams on hold, and I finished my M.S in Electrical and Computer Engineering in one semester and I graduated in May 2016.

Microsoft recruited me out of Georgia Tech, and I moved to Washington state to work for them. I have been working at Microsoft for the last four years. I currently work as a Software Engineer on the Word team and my areas of expertise are performance and accessibility. Microsoft applied for an H1B visa, and I am on that right now. I lost my pathway to citizenship when I turned 21. I was kicked out of my mom's permanent residency application.

I was extremely fortunate. There were so many people who provided me with their time and other resources to help me on my journey. I am incredibly grateful to them. I also know that I was super lucky to have an opportunity to study computer science and engineering. But I am acutely aware that lots of children (especially in rural communities) in this country do not have that opportunity. So, I have been a volunteer high school computer science teacher for the last

three years through the TEALS program. I have been teaching at Mabton High School in Mabton, WA. It has been one of the most fulfilling things that I have done in my life. My family and I also started a scholarship program at Georgia State University to provide a scholarship that has no immigration status requirements. The Rajasekaran family scholarship will start providing scholarships starting in Fall 2021.

My sincere hope is that distinguished members of this committee can come together in a bipartisan way to provide a pathway to citizenship for all children who grew up here and call America home. I also hope that this committee can find bipartisan solutions for other immigration issues that plague the employment based immigration system. Thanks for taking the time to read my story and thanks for the opportunity to share it.

Aneesh Komanduri (Arkansas)

My family immigrated to the US from India when I was just 8 years old for my father's job. I have lived in the US for more than 14 years now so I've been in the US for most of my life. I barely remember anything from when I was in India. I turned 21 in August of 2020 and aged out of the immigration system. I was not able to get my permanent residency along with my family despite having been a dependent on my father's work visa at the time of applying for permanent residency. As of now, I have no clear pathway to citizenship. I am currently pursuing a PhD and hope that I can get my permanent residency before I graduate in a couple years. If not, I may be forced to leave the only country I know.

Sri Harini Kundu

In December of 2006, at the age of seven, I came from Singapore to the United States as an H4 dependent child . This was just the first of many moves my family would make. We first lived in Dallas, Texas where I learned how to speak American English. In 5th grade, we moved to Edison, New Jersey and lived there for about seven years. Then, when my mom got a new job, we moved to Charlotte, North Carolina during the start of my senior year in high school. Moving around during some of the most key times in my life was challenging enough, but I had bigger problems to think about. While my little sister was born in Texas and has U.S. citizenship, the rest of my family and I don't even have permanent residency in the U.S. My dad applied for our green card back in November, 2011 and still has not received his green card. Now, at the age of 22, I feel America is my only home and I don't want to give up my life in America. I finally feel like I belong here, but it wasn't this way at first.

For the first few years, I faced a lot of struggles trying to fit in. My English was different from my peers and I didn't understand the social norms so I got picked on a lot. A lot of kids my age and younger would tell me to go back to where I came from, and that I didn't belong here. But I ignored it all and focused on fitting in so that people would never say something so hurtful to me again. Now I am in college, and when I tell people I came from a different country and have been living here for so long, they can't believe it since I act and speak exactly like them. I don't remember much of Singapore because I only spent my early childhood there. Most of my memories that I remember are the ones I made here in the United States.

My wish from Congress is that they pass a solution to permanently end aging out so that people like me can finally feel like they truly belong here. A lot of us only have memories from the time we spent in the US and the friends we made here. None of us want to leave that behind. Most importantly though, I don't want to be separated from my family after I complete my

education. I'll have to self-deport in one year if nothing changes. I hope that one day parents don't have to worry about their child living in another country that is now foreign to them. Personally, my parents worry about what would happen if I somehow had to go back to Singapore and they were living here in the United States with my sister while they waited for their Green Card. That scenario is something none of us like to imagine but my family and I think about it everyday.

I currently attend the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and am going to graduate this upcoming fall with my bachelors degree in Psychology. There are a lot of "what-if" scenarios my family and I keep in the front of our minds everyday. All we want is for this issue to be fixed so that there is some kind of relief and stability for all of us. I don't want to move away from my home.

Bhavey Jain

I look back at the days before the college application season of my senior year in high school when I never felt any different than any of my classmates, my teammates on the tennis team, or other people I interacted with at school. Whenever the American Dream was discussed in my history class or given as a prompt to write about in English, I never felt as if I would have any shackles that would prevent me from working hard and achieving my dreams in this land of opportunities, this country of immigrants. However, everything changed when I started applying to colleges and the beautiful illusion in which I was living shattered as I learned more about my identity as a documented dreamer.

During the college application season was the first time I learned what it meant to be an H4 dependent and how my family along with tens of thousands of other families of Indian origin were stuck in an eternal green card backlog. I slowly learned about how I would need to build my future as an international student in college, prompting me to change my major to Computer Science from Finance to maximize my chances of having a future in the country I call home. After learning about my situation, I immediately went to all of my fellow first generation immigrant friends in school and asked whether any of them were in a similar situation, hoping to seek companionship during this unravelling time. To my dismay, I found that I was the only one that was different, the one black sheep who was not a U.S citizen. During that time I could not process why all of this was happening to me. I was frustrated as to why I was different from everyone else, especially my fellow first generation immigrant friends who also had not been born in the U.S, when I had lived in this country just as long as most of them and even longer than a few. I would ask myself everyday why am I different from the rest when I talk the same,

play the same sports, study in the same classes, and place my hand over my heart and say the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of school just like everyone else.

What bothered me the most was the chains that I felt that had been suddenly placed upon my aspirations, preventing me from having an equal opportunity to pursue my dreams. Since elementary school I had always been taught that in America hard work is rewarded and everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue their dreams no matter their inborn attributes. However, because my parents were born in India, their kids were not equal.

Despite no longer feeling equal, I still continued to believe that America was the land of opportunities, and I decided to embody the determination and spirit of the immigrants who have come to America throughout the centuries and let their dreams and efforts help the U.S flourish into the economic powerhouse it is today. I thought to myself, I may have to work harder than everyone, but I will still succeed and secure my future in the country I love and belong. I decided to embrace my identity as a documented dreamer and make it my mission to become great so that the world could see how valuable we documented dreamers are and everything we have to offer.

I started by aiming to become an expert in my field and used my learnings in Computer Science to build an Android App featuring testimonies from Documented Dreamers to raise awareness about us and published the app on the Google Play Store. During the summer and fall of 2021 when the internship season for Computer Science students at my university was underway, I would use every opportunity I had when speaking with recruiters to inform them about the app I made as one of my side projects and thereby raising awareness for the issue while simultaneously showing how proactive documented dreamers are. Through my efforts I obtained a software engineering internship at a top Silicon Valley company and became one of the first

students from my college and all of the universities in my home state of Indiana who was able to pass the high hiring bar for interns set by this company. I will continue to strive for greatness and show the country I call home what documented dreamers are capable of and how the American spirit burns bright in our hearts.

Varsha Prabhu

People always assume falsely that it was my father's end goal for my family to move to the United States. It was not. It was a chance job offer that catalyzed a one way trip from Toronto, Ontario to Columbus, Ohio.

I've lived in the same Columbus suburb since I was eight years old. I've graduated elementary school, middle school, high school, and eventually will graduate from college here. But despite spending my formative years here, I have no clear pathway to citizenship.

Documented dreamers are those that have lived in the United States for most of their lives with a documented status, but age out of their parent's visa at the age of 21. This was something that weighed on my mind heavily while applying for colleges. If I stayed in the States for college, this meant I would have to switch to an international student visa around the age of 21, and fully acknowledge that a country and state I've lived in since I was a child considered me an outsider. I almost returned back to Canada for college because of the distress this concept caused me. I did not want to live in a country that considered me an outsider.

A chance chain of events that required me to stay close to family later, and I found myself attending college in the States anyways. My status qualified me for practically no aid, so the only financially feasible option for my family was the State college nearby while commuting 30 minutes away from my parents' home. I love my university, but I loathe the fact that my status took away the concept of choice in where I attend for me.

I am currently working towards an undergraduate degree in psychology with the goal of eventually attending medical school. I've watched the toll dealing with the American immigration system has taken on my parents' health throughout the years. I've watched as their bodies ached and pained for seemingly no reason. I've watched them dodge questions from physicians asking them what possibly is causing them so much stress. I've watched their distrust of physicians who would simply tell them to "apply for citizenship" grow throughout the years. I've watched them unable to access the healthcare they both needed and deserved.

I want to add my voice into the healthcare world to advocate for the unique struggles that immigrants face, and help them feel more at ease receiving healthcare. But despite being an immigrant who has grown up in the States for most of my life, my immigration status has not made this easy for me.

On a dependent visa, I am not eligible to work. Many entry level research and healthcare jobs require one to be both certified and paid. How am I supposed to demonstrate my scientific knowledge if the most basic of research positions do not want me? How am I supposed to demonstrate an interest in healthcare if even the most basic of jobs are inaccessible to me? How am I supposed to demonstrate to med schools that I am interested in healthcare if I have practically no patient experience under my belt?

All things considered, I've persevered. I consider myself to be incredibly successful despite my circumstances. I've currently been able to gain patient care experience through volunteering at a local hospice, and with the help of a classmate and professor, published my first

research article in December 2021. I consider myself to be incredibly fortunate, because my dreams are still very much within grasp because of my drive (internal) and Canadian citizenship (external).

I don't face a lot of the struggles that other documented dreamers face. If my international student visa does not get processed before I turn 21, as long as it's been filed for, I don't need to self deport. Canadians are allowed to freely remain in the States without a visa. My family does not need to be separated. Although the number of medical schools that I can apply for drastically decreases because of my status, the number that I can apply to is still more than the average documented dreamer. Of the medical schools that accept international students, many hold a preference towards Canadians. My dreams are still very much within my grasp.

But these aren't struggles that me, or any other documented dreamer for that matter should have to face. I should not have had to ever question if there was ever a future for me here in America. Documented dreamers are American, regardless of what a paper tells us. The American government may be rushing to forget about us, but I will not let it.

I saw a tweet recently, and it asked the world,

What polarized you?

And it got me thinking. At which point in my life did I realize that the world wasn't as magical as I thought, but a messed up place? One day as a young teenager, still learning the injustices of the world, I suddenly realized that there was something fundamentally different setting me apart from my peers, who enjoyed certain privileges merely on the basis of their place of birth. I looked back at my life and saw a *lifetime* of being seen as nothing more than an out of place immigrant in the government's eyes.

I have lived in America nearly my entire life. I moved here with my family when I was nine months old. Ever since I can remember, there have been visa renewals every three years, entire days spent at consulates in Chennai, hoping and praying that this time, we won't get rejected, because it has happened to too many people around us.

But why do we have to prove our right to exist in a country that has historically opened its arms wide to the world? A country that stands as a beacon for freedom and success?

I love America with all my heart. I love the expansive plains and the verdant forests and the glittering lakes around which I have grown up. I love America from sea to shining sea. I love that America's the only country in the world where you can find people from everywhere and anywhere — people who love this country as much as I do. I am an American in my heart and soul.

I have been waiting to be acknowledged as an American nearly my entire life, but in the eyes of this nation, I'm nothing more than a transient immigrant. Every time that I walk through immigration at the airport, I join a winding line. The sign says, in gray letters: *Aliens*. I'm not an alien. That may be the official term, but I'm not an alien. I'm a person who is seventeen years old, looking forward to my future, but I'm finding myself hanging precariously on the cusp of adulthood. For most people, adulthood means freedom, but for me, it brings a sinking sense of dread, because it indicates yet another year closer to aging out of my dependent visa.

I'm not alone.

There are thousands like me, who face uncertain futures. College freshmen who are forced to switch to international student visas in order to support themselves in college, but are now hit with much more expensive tuition. Other high school students like me who can't get internships because of their immigration status, and find themselves behind in the desperate race to college.

For the last four years, people like me have faced things we did not even know could happen. I have seen people like me, who have lived here their entire lives, forced to move back to their home country, unfamiliar to them in every way except nationality. I have seen so much and I have feared for my future, because right now, there is no certainty.

But there is hope. I know that there is hope. There are countless advocacy groups and grassroots organizations, filled with people united under the fierce, undying hope that change can be accomplished. People who push for immigration issues to be spotlighted in the media, and people who aren't afraid to make their opinions known. When I realized that I needed to be a part of the movement, I *let* myself get polarized. I let the anger and the fear and the horrible uncertainty fuel me, and I started reading up on policy and following legislative action. I started a podcast with my friend, and together we reported on political happenings so that other teenagers like us could understand, so that more of our fiery, incandescently angry generation could get involved.

It's not enough, though. The immigration problem needs to gain the attention of more than just the people who are directly affected by it. Issues concerning the aging out of young adults and the backlog of greencards need to be featured more prominently in the media and lead to changes in legislative agendas. More people need to viscerally understand the fear of potentially being kicked out from the only home you've ever known.

This polarized me.

And it's time more people said that.