

Gabriela Maria Rodriguez Acuña

Bridgeport, CT

Testimony in Support of HB 7039

March 30, 2015

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Members of the Judiciary Committee

Hello, my name is Gabriela Maria Rodriguez Acuña, and I am here to testify in support of amendments to the TRUST act. I am a resident of Bridgeport, CT, and am currently a first-year at Tufts University. I am also the daughter of two Costa Rican immigrants.

My mom came to the United States on a student visa when she was 16 years old and completed high school in Norwalk, CT. She began college there as well, but could not finish for family reasons. My mother remained in the country, working all sorts of jobs, ranging from a hotel maid to a nurse's aid to a telecommunications person to a Spanish teacher for the Peace Corps and so on. She married and began a family with my father, another Costa Rican immigrant from the same college and high school. She had my two sisters, Carolina and Melissa, and six months after Melissa was born, was deported because her visa had expired long ago. My father was allowed to remain in the country and pursue his citizenship. Although my sisters had been born in the United States and could stay, my parents both decided that it was best that the girls stay with their mother and other relatives in Costa Rica.

I'm sure that most of you are familiar with how long the naturalization process takes in this country, so to make a long story short, it took my mother and sisters seven years to be allowed back into the United States. My mother did not see her husband for seven years. My sister Carolina did not see her father for seven years. My sister Melissa, who was too young to remember the whole thing, did not meet her father for seven years. Additionally, in those seven years, one of mom's brothers, who was still in the United States, contracted AIDS and died without seeing her.

This all happened in the 1980s, and deportations have gotten much worse since then. Between 1980 and 1991, only 213,000 immigrants were deported. Now, the United States deports twice that amount every year, over 400,000 deporter per year. That statistic, of course, doesn't include the thousands of immigrants that were detained in immigration prisons and eventually released. How many families do you think were split up? How many parents separated from children, spouses separated from spouses, much like in my own family? Between 2008 and 2012 alone, more than 200,000 parents of US citizen children were deported.

Thank you for listening. I appreciate your time.