



The first case of this nature I ever worked on was the case of John (I have changed his name to protect his privacy). I share this experience with you because it was the most grueling and heartbreaking experience of my life as an advocate. Despite years of work, hundreds of supporters, thousands of dollars spent in legal fees, actions, and more—we kept hitting roadblock after roadblock.

John arrived in the US when he was four years old as a legal permanent resident. He lived here his entire life and his family had also migrated to Connecticut. Over a decade ago while suffering from an undiagnosed mental illness John committed a crime. He was convicted of Assault 3rd and Robbery 3rd. He was urged to take a plea of one year jail. This was his first and only conviction. After he served one year in jail, John attempted to reintegrate into society. He got a job and started a family. Over 10 years after he served time in jail, immigration came looking for him.

Before his case came to my attention, John had been caged by immigration for over a year without seeing a judge (he was subject to mandatory detention because he had been convicted of an “aggravated felony”). Because of his mental health disability, he was often placed in solitary confinement for weeks at a time. He was stripped of his clothing, left to sleep on a metal bed without sheets, he was not allowed to call or communicate with his family.

After over a year in immigration jail, John was released (after much public pressure). John again resumed his life, got a new job, and was able to be there for his children again. But his case was still pending. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we fought about a year and a half after his release, he was rearrested by ICE and after his last appeal was denied, John was deported to a country he had not seen since the age of 4.

Since I met John, I have worked with countless individuals and their families that are going through the same nightmare. I often have to tell them to prepare themselves for a really long and possibly futile legal fight. That is because Connecticut’s current laws take away discretion from immigration judges. Individuals that may otherwise be eligible for a certain kind of immigration relief are unable to apply for such benefits because judges cannot consider the totality of the circumstances and any hardship that may result in their deportation.

While the federal government continues to destroy families and tear away members from our community, we have a moral obligation as a state to protect all of our residents. Once again, I urge you to support HB 5544.

Thank you.