

February 15, 2012

Chairman Brunk and Honorable Members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony in opposition to HB2576. As someone who knows firsthand the dreams that bring immigrants to the U.S., and the contributions they make once they are here, HB2576 makes me sad. As someone who is proud to call the United States home, and who is proud of what I have given and continue to give to my country, HB2576 makes me angry. I hope that you will reject the message that this legislation sends and, instead, turn your attention to creating the opportunity structures that can make stories like mine even more common.

I was brought to the United States in 1994 just before my 10th birthday. My parents made the decision to unite the family. At that time like many other families, my father was living in the United States in order to provide to his family in Mexico. It was a tough decision to make, rather than my dad moving to Mexico, he decided it was best for my mother, brother, and me to move to the United States. The decision was hard because it meant we would be leaving a whole life and family in Mexico. It included the hard and long process of starting a new life in a different country, with different norms, language, and culture. In 1994 my father was a legal US resident and had already petitioned for his family to come to the United States. Because of the long and tedious process, he decided it would be best to bring us into the United States as undocumented immigrants. We simply could not tolerate the separation anymore. When the day finally arrived, it was a long voyage full of fear and uncertainty. It was very hard to leave my grandparents, my cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends. But the payoff was better: reuniting with my father, being a family, and better opportunities to grow and make something out of life--a chance at the American dream. My father had a job and supported 2 children and a wife, because my mother did not work and we did not seek government assistance. We were just happy with the minimum. My brother and I started school shortly after we arrived. This was a very hard transition; learning a new language and adapting to a different culture was hard. But because we had desire and great people around us to motivate us, we overcame many obstacles.

I started school in January of 1994 and by the fall of 1995; I was already in an all-English speaking classroom just like any other American citizen. My teachers were amazed by how quickly I learned the language. As I continued with my education, I also continued to better myself and achieve good grades. I never made it a point to receive good grades in hopes of a higher education, though. At that time it was something unreachable to me because of the high cost. Yet it did not stop me from being an A student. In 1999, my mother, brother, and I finally became legal United States residents and it was a very happy day. I later returned to my home country and saw my grandparents and other family members who were left behind. I then discovered that I loved to visit but that was it. I could never return to make a living there. We had made a life of our own here and realized that the United States was our home.

In 2000 I started working, and despite the fact that I liked receiving money and working for my own things, I never neglected my education. I continued to earn good grades and be a good student. I graduated high school in the winter of 2001. I had enough credits and good grades allowing me to graduate a semester early. The thought of college scared me. It scared me to

House Fed & State Affairs

Date: 2-16-12

Attachment 15

accept the fact that I wanted to go to college and did not know how I would get there and even more how I would pay for it. In 2003 an opportunity knocked on my door. A representative from KU's College Assistant Migrant Program talked to me about the opportunity to attend college. I qualified because my father worked in agriculture and I was the first generation of my family to graduate high school. Now, I could hope that I would be first generation to graduate college. I decided to take the opportunity and in the fall of 2003 I started my studies at the University of Kansas. The path was not easy at all, but once again I embarked on the long voyage and decided I was not going to quit. In 2004 I made the decision and perhaps the sacrifice to join the United States Army Reserves. Not even a year to the first anniversary of the war with Iraq. I made the decision all on my own, because I was not recruited. Ever since 9/11, something inside me drew me to the military. It was not until the summer of 2004 that it all made sense. One day during basic training while singing the national anthem, I realized that I was becoming a Soldier--an American Soldier. Although I was technically not a United States citizen I felt that I was an American just like the other trainees. The day, after all of my rigorous training, that I became a United States Solider, was another day of celebration in my life.

I returned home from my training and continued working towards my college degree. In 2008 the payoff finally came and I graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in Sociology and a minor in French. 2008 was also a special year because in March of that year I became a United States citizen through naturalization. Today I continue to serve in the military for I signed a contract for 8 more years and recently volunteered for a deployment in Afghanistan. I currently work in social services and work with many immigrant families both documented and undocumented. These are families just like my family once was, families who left everything they have for a piece of the American dream. These are families who contribute to this country and perhaps have a young daughter like I once was. I see my own past in their lives, and I see the potential in their future, too. To realize the dreams of those who walk where I once did, Kansas must recognize the promise and hope of immigrants today, and reject laws that would tear families apart, create division and fear in our communities, and prevent stories just like mine.

Sincerely,

Glenda Hernandez

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15-2