

STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND  
BORDER SECURITY  
  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
  
UNITED STATES SENATE

AT A HEARING ENTITLED  
“THE DREAM ACT”

PRESENTED  
  
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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cornyn, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

I was 5 years old, but I remember it like it was yesterday. Apprehensively, I teetered into the perplexing classroom. Children spoke in a language completely foreign to me. The teacher, too, spoke and pointed a certain direction. What did she want me to do? Where did she want me to go? I stood there, frozen still and silent like a statue. The children stared. They laughed. After a week of my unrelenting silence, I was directed into the principal's office. My mother was there too, seated to the right of the translator that had helped my mother enroll me in school. The teacher spoke and the translator began speaking too.

"She says Ola might need special attention. She barely socializes with the other kids and she's not learning anything."

My mother looked at me. She had newly developed circles beneath her eyes. The subtle light brown summer glow which she had obtained during our last month in Albania had now diminished. I looked at the clock. It was one o'clock—at this time a month ago she would have been picking me up from preschool on her lunch break. However, we had left that life, and started a new one. A new life in which my mother worked eighteen hour days and an hour off work was unthinkable.

"She suggests that Ola should be taken out of the general class and put into the ELL program so that she can get the extra assistance she needs."

My mother rose.

“I will speak to my daughter, and I will call you to inform you of our decision.”

Hand in hand, we marched out to the front of the school. Even her hands had changed—although they had always been hard-working and resilient, America had molded them into calloused machinery that never seemed to stop working. Waiting for a neighbor to pick us up and take my mother back to work, we sank into one of the nearby benches facing the school.

“Ola, do you know why mommy brought you here? Why we left and came to this place?”

I shook my head—I could not understand why we now faced a life saturated with seemingly endless obstacles.

“When I was younger, I had big hopes, big ambitions, big dreams. I wanted to be someone. I wanted to change the world. As I grew older, in a culture in which women are subordinated and oppressed, those dreams were eradicated and I was told what role I would play in society’s theater and who I was to become. I had no voice, no power, no freedom. I look at you and I see your potential. The thought of you not having ample opportunity to toil and rise to your fullest potential, the thought of you being oppressed into a complacent, clinical, cynical woman, the thought of you being robbed of your aspirations repulsed me. I brought you to a place where work is essential; I brought you to a place where opportunity is plentiful. Nothing will be handed you, my daughter. Everything you hope to acquire, you must earn. You determine how far you will march in life. No one can purloin your voice here, unless you let them.”

My mother looked at the school.

“Your teachers think you belong in a special class, a slower class for students that can’t speak quite as well as all the other kids. You know what you’re capable of doing, so I’ll let you decide which route you wish to take. Think carefully, though because every opportunity missed is an opportunity lost.”

My mother and I have come a long way since that day, thirteen years ago. I have become proficient in the English language and have excelled in my studies. I have watched my mother purchase a business and work from four A.M. until nine P.M. so that she could afford to pay for my sister’s tuition for her undergraduate and graduate degrees. I have seen her sacrifice, not refilling her prescriptions because money was tight and property taxes were due. And so, I worked harder. Since the third grade I have been placed in advanced programs, all of which I have fully utilized. I have taken every Advanced Placement course my school has offered and have earned a 4.4 grade point average. I earned a 30 on my ACT with English as my highest score. In high school I was a varsity athlete—I ran cross country in the fall and I played tennis in the spring. I was the treasurer of the Senior Class Student Council and I was the treasurer of the National Honor Society at my school. Furthermore, I tutor other students that are still struggling to become proficient in English. I received numerous scholarship offers and was accepted to several Universities, including the University of Michigan.

. I have visited Washington D.C. numerous times and still am awed by the advancements of humanity in the American culture.

I commit countless hours to community service and charity events because I feel that big change comes through little steps. I juggle all my school work, after school

activities, and community service projects while also having a job. I have completely immersed myself within the American culture, of which I so strongly desire to become a citizen.

I am currently enrolled at the University of Michigan, one of the most prestigious public universities in the nation, where this fall I will begin studying Pre Med with a concentration in Behavioral and Cognitive Science. I registered for my classes this past week and enrolled myself in a whopping seventeen credit semester.

I aspire to ultimately become a surgical oncologist, but more importantly, despite seemingly endless obstacles, I intend to work for patients that cannot afford the astronomical fees accompanying life saving surgeries, patients that are denied the medical treatment they deserve. My goal is not to increase my bank account; my goal is to decrease preventable deaths. How can I go to a lucrative job everyday knowing that there are mothers wasting away in front of their children because they cannot afford surgery? I cannot and I will not. I wish to remain in this country to make a difference, and help American citizens.

In late March, I was told I would be deported in less than a week. I was two weeks short of obtaining my high school diploma. It was shocked. How could I be sent to a place I did not remember? A culture completely foreign to me? I am not fluent in Albanian, so if I were to be sent back, I could not pursue a college education in Albania. My hard work, my dreams, and my future were at risk of being eradicated. I have considered one country, and one country only, to be my home. America is my home, not Albania.

My community rallied around me. They asked for my deportation to be suspended. The Department of Homeland Security responded and granted me deferred action for one year so I can continue my studies.

My family came here legally and we followed the law every step of the way. Despite my compliance with the law, there is no way I can obtain citizenship under current law; despite all my hard work and contributions, I face removal from the only country I have considered home. Despite my aspirations and good intentions for my country, I face deportation in less than a year.

I am a DREAM Act student. I was brought to this country when I was 4 years old. I grew up here. I am American in my heart.

There are thousands of other Dreamers just like me. All we are asking for is a chance to contribute to the country we love. Please support the DREAM Act.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of all of the Dreamers.