

The Honorable Charles Grassley
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

October 2, 2017

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein,

My name is Denisse Rojas Marquez and I am one of roughly 800,000 individuals approved for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The United States has been my home for twenty-seven years. I consider myself a hard-working American, a proud Californian, and most recently a New Yorker. I am currently studying medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (one of the premier medical schools in the country) and two years away from becoming an MD, after which I intend to work as a doctor in underserved communities here in the United States. I am writing to share my story, the impact DACA has had on my life, and the devastating consequences of terminating the program without a permanent solution in place.

I arrived to the United States from Mexico in 1990 in my mother's arms; I was a small infant. My family and I settled in Fremont, California. I took my first steps in a two-bedroom apartment where I spent most of my childhood. I have loved this country for as long as I can remember. My mother tells me that before I started school, I was so eager to speak in English that I would call my relatives over the phone, declare I knew English, and proceed to speak in gibberish. In grade school, I learned not only the English language, but American values and beliefs. I learned that if you work hard enough there is no mountain that can't be overcome. I learned that helping others and giving back to your community is an American way of life. I was thus determined to give back fiercely to my own community. From volunteering as an altar server at my church to teaching second grade students how to read; I spent my summers as a teenager taking the bus around the city to help others.

While attending college at UC Berkeley, my situation became difficult. Paying for tuition with no access to government financial aid, commuting over an hour each way to school, and lacking proper documents to participate in many academic opportunities were just some of the obstacles I faced. My family and I also feared being detained by immigration officials. Because of these fears, we lived in a nondescript apartment complex where our unit was tucked away in the furthest corner from the street. I felt terrified, hopeless at times, and an extreme sense of isolation. Nonetheless, I trudged along and with my family's unwavering support, trusted mentors, and scholarship and academic programs, I earned my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology and Sociology from UC Berkeley in 2012. Among my proudest achievements in college was participating in a genetics lab where my research team and I discovered a molecular process in plants not previously identified which earned us publication in *Science*, one of the world's top academic journals.

After college, I continued my passion of helping others and volunteered at San Francisco General Hospital, tutored students in community college, and started a national group called Pre-Health Dreamers, along with two colleagues, to support other undocumented youth like myself who have aspirations of becoming health professionals. Pre-Health Dreamers serves over 800 individuals in 42 states and provides our members with resources, information, and advocacy, to pursue a career in healthcare and science. I have gained national recognition for my successes; in 2016, I was awarded the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, for up to \$90,000 in graduate study, which honors the contributions of immigrants and children of immigrants in the United States. In 2017, I was selected from among 15,000 applicants as a member of the Forbes '30 Under 30' list for creating more equity in Education. A personal triumph arrived when I gained acceptance to attend the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

My successes are also rooted in the lessons my family taught me growing up. Leaving Mexico with less than a high school education, my mother, in America, discovered that education was the key to prosperity and thus learned English, attained a high school equivalency diploma, and eventually, a nursing degree. Watching her study chemistry

into the night while providing for my siblings and me and balancing many other responsibilities taught me hard work, determination, and resiliency. My father, who has worked in a variety of trades from the service industry to manufacturing and construction, taught me that the two most important ingredients for success are humility and creativity. My father further taught me devotion to community: as a truck driver for over 10 years, he has developed new infrastructure for communities by helping create roads, bridges, and buildings. My older brother, eight years my senior, has torn down walls for me to pursue my own education. He graduated from San Jose State University as a computer software engineer in 2003 at a time when attending college as an undocumented person was nearly impossible. He has taught me to think outside the box, to take the road less traveled, and to never take no for an answer. My older sister, my other half, has paved my path. She always pushed herself in school, and I followed her example. She aspired to attend UC Berkeley, it became my goal as well. She dreamed of becoming a doctor, I made it my own dream. She is now a researcher at UC Berkeley, with a Master of Public Health degree from UC Davis, and conducts research to combat obesity in Latino communities and other public health crises. Her view of the world has transformed my own, and inspires me to better the health of communities in need.

When DACA arrived in 2012, it was a relief to so many, like myself, who could continue their educational endeavors, resume their careers or simply let themselves dream of a better future. I diligently filled out my application which included a thorough background check. It felt surreal when my DACA approval came in the mail; my sister and I held each other in tears. Along with DACA, came a work-permit, a social security number, and security from the threat of deportation. DACA was the answer that lifted the ceiling to my educational and career ambitions. DACA was the key to securing a driver's license, obtaining employment, and gaining acceptance to medical school. DACA lifted me out of the shadows, in every sense possible; I no longer lived in fear. Unfortunately, this sense of security felt short-lived when Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced on September 5th, 2017 the Trump Administration's decision to rescind DACA. Hearing the announcement felt as though everything I had work so hard to achieve could disappear in the blink of an eye. Terminating DACA means I will not be able to practice as a doctor. It means that every aspiration and goal I have will once again be made unreachable. Practically speaking, I don't know how I'll survive after graduation; how will I be able to pay my rent, pay off my loans, have income for food, and other basic necessities? This announcement is a broken promise, to all of us who submitted our personal information, in good faith and trust in our government, in exchange for benefits that have allowed us to move forward with our lives. With DACA, people have been able to find employment, create small businesses, start families, buy homes, go to school; in some ways our lives started because of DACA.

Now, the fates of 800,000 individuals rest in your hands. I understand that it can be difficult to relate to this situation. However, you do know what it's like to make investments in your future; you have invested in your education, pursued your career aspirations, applied for jobs, and made a living to provide for yourselves and your families. I ask that you and your colleagues restore these opportunities for us as well. Moreover, with the approaching holidays, I imagine you will spend time with your loved ones --your siblings, your parents, your children, and spouses. It has been 10 years since my family and I last spent the holidays together. It is an agony that I live with everyday being separated from my family. Which is why I am asking for a fair legislation, like the DREAM Act, that provides a long-term solution for all the 800,000 DACA recipients, for those who missed qualifications for DACA by a margin and other equally deserving individuals who make contributions to America and are part of this great nation's fabric.

Respectfully,

Denisse Rojas Marquez