

Testimony of Foday Turay before the Senate Judiciary Committee
“How Mass Deportations Will Separate American Families, Harm our Armed Forces, and Devastate Our Economy”

December 10, 2024

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and Members of the Committee, good morning and thank you all for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Foday Turay. I am a DACA recipient, a prosecutor, a husband, and a dad. I am also, without a question, a patriot. My love for this country stems from my elementary school days, when I recited the Pledge of Allegiance with all my classmates each morning. In fact, I did not understand that my immigration status differed from theirs until I was near the end of my high school career.

My family – like so many generations of people before me – came to the United States in search of freedom and safety. I was born in Sierra Leone at a time of great civil unrest. When I was four years old, my father was killed, and my mother, grandmother, and I fled to Guinea. My mother was able to migrate to the United States, but I stayed behind with my grandmother. Sadly, my grandmother became ill and died shortly after my mother left. I was able to come to the United States on my seventh(7th) birthday in 2003. I have been here ever since.

I learned that I was undocumented when I tried to get a driver’s license. It was one of the worst days of my life. The path I had outlined in my head of law school and being an attorney suddenly seemed impossible. Still, I never wavered in my faith and hope in this country. I was thrown a lifeline when DACA was announced in 2012. The day I received my work permit and social security number was one of my best childhood memories because I finally had an identity in the country that I had come to love. Thanks to DACA, I was able to attend college, but because of my immigration status, I had no access to scholarships or financial aid. I worked for Uber eats to make ends meet, bringing my textbooks with me on food order runs. My hard work paid off: I earned a full merit scholarship to Penn State Dickinson Law, where I received my J.D. in 2023. I now work full-time for the District Attorney’s office in Philadelphia, where I help victims of crime navigate a complex legal system.

During this time, my roots in this country have only grown deeper. I met and married my beautiful wife, Jaxhiel, a U.S. citizen who is here today with me and whose own family members are serving and have served the country in the military. We are proud homeowners, and we’re parents to a beautiful 18-month-old baby boy.

The opportunity to address all of you on behalf of hundreds of thousands of DACA recipients and undocumented spouses like me is not one I take for granted. I have lived in this country for 21 years, my wife and I have spent the past years building community in this great country, and we are worried about what the future might bring if we are ripped away from these communities. For me, the consequences are felt on three levels: personally, at a community level, and at a societal level.

On a personal level: My family – all of whom are now U.S. citizens – is here. If I were to be deported to Sierra Leone, not only would I be completely unfamiliar with the culture, but I would also have no family there, and very little connection to any community networks, to help sustain me. In addition, while my wife and I are equal partners in life, I am blessed to be the breadwinner in our family. If I were to be deported, my wife and our son would likely need to rely on government assistance to make ends meet. My young son would also be without a father, which would be devastating for him, Jaxhiel, and me. My deportation would result in significant stress and strain for my wife's entire family as well, not to mention for my own U.S. citizen mother. My wife is the caregiver for her mother, who is legally disabled and has a brain tumor that requires a chemotherapy injection once a month to stop it from growing. Our two-income household allows my wife to care for her mother without the burden of obtaining another job. If I were to be deported, my wife's brother, who is currently serving in the Marines, would be hindered from reenlisting in order to help support their mother. Deportation does not only impact the individual, but it also has consequences for all the U.S. citizens who have built their lives around an undocumented individual.

My case is not unusual: DACA recipients have established deep ties to this nation. The average DACA recipient [entered](#) the country at 7 years old. DACA recipients such as I have called the United States home for decades. Our lives have become deeply rooted with other U.S. citizens who depend on our income and contribution at home and in our community. My wife, who was born and raised here, should not have to choose between caring for her mother or continuing to build a family with me. My brother-in-law should not have to choose between reenlisting in the Marines next year after years in service or risk his mother suffering due to my wife not being able to care for their mother. The devastation caused by deportation affects not only mixed-status families but also the communities they serve.

On a community level: I'm a taxpayer and city employee in Philadelphia serving as an Assistant District Attorney. A significant portion of my wages are allocated toward taxes. As a homeowner, I also pay property tax, all of which I am happy to do, as I know those taxes help fund my

community's roads, schools, and the overall well-being of U.S. citizens. If I were to be ripped from my community, the taxes I pay would go with me. My wife and I are both devout Christians, with strong ties to our church and extended families. Furthermore, I am an active member of American Families United, an organization that advocates for undocumented spouses of U.S. citizens. Finally, the people of Philadelphia would be hurt if I were to disappear: victims of crime whose cases I prosecute would lose an ally in their fight for justice, and the cases I've built would suffer.

In fact, I am not the only DACA recipient in my office. My friend and colleague, Reyna, has reworked entire segments of our criminal justice IT infrastructure, allowing us to better monitor our cases and serve the people of Philadelphia. She has built the infrastructure behind an entirely new case management system set to be launched next year, which will make life easier for all of us prosecutors. Our work matters not just to immigrants, but to everyone.

DACA recipients [pay](#) an estimated \$6.2 billion in federal taxes and \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes each year. These are critical revenues that help support social welfare programs that many U.S. citizens rely on. Nearly [50%](#) of DACA recipients have at least one child in the home. By deporting DACA recipients, the country is removing tax-paying revenue while increasing the number of U.S. citizen children and spouses of DACA recipients, such as my wife and son, who may have to rely on social welfare programs as a result of one fewer income in the home.

On a societal level, mass deportations would be devastating. As a prosecutor, I've seen firsthand how delicate the ties between law enforcement and immigrant communities can be. If immigrants are afraid to cooperate with police or prosecutors as victims of – or witnesses to – crime because they are afraid of deportation, we all suffer. When you have ICE agents patrolling courthouses and police stations, you are creating a category of people who are less willing to report crime and less willing to cooperate with law enforcement in solving crimes. When fear of deportation spreads through the communities, especially in mixed-status communities such as Philadelphia, citizens become less safe because you have an increase in unsolved crimes and less prosecution. Prosecutors like me are less able find a witness willing to testify due to fear of deportation. These policies could have the effect of increasing crime while hindering our ability to prosecute. I know others who work as teachers, doctors, nurses, or entrepreneurs whose communities would face similar ripple effects if they were snatched from this country.

I dream of a future unencumbered by my immigration status. I hope to one day serve our nation at the federal level. I long for the day when I can live without fear that I will be torn away from my son, just as my father was so cruelly taken from me. While DACA has been a lifeline, I hope for a day when I do not have to live in fear of a Fifth Circuit ruling or an Executive Branch decree. I live for the day I no longer must survive on a subscription plan.

While we do not know what the next administration will bring, we do know that mass deportations don't just hurt immigrants. They hurt all of us: our families, our community, and our society. We owe it to ourselves and to our country to think beyond a mindset of scarcity and fear, and to instead develop plans to ensure that immigrants can remain here.

Until that day comes, I will continue to contribute everything I can to the people of Philadelphia, to my faith community, and to my family. I strongly believe that a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers and border security can coexist. This body can change the lives of Dreamers by coming together and allowing us to live our lives and continue to contribute to our community without fear of deportation. After over a decade of paying taxes, I dream of a day when I no longer have to reject applying for a position not because of my immigration status. Thank you all so much for your time and attention to this critical issue.