

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HIRONO

Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
“How Comprehensive Immigration Reform Should Address the Needs of Women and Families”
Monday, March 18, 2013

Good afternoon, everyone. I am pleased to call to order this hearing of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. This hearing is titled, “How comprehensive Immigration Reform Should Address the Needs of Women and Families.” It will be an opportunity to learn about how immigration impacts women and families, as we begin to consider the ways in which we will reform our immigration laws.

I’d like to welcome each of the witnesses, and Senator Franken for joining us today.

I would like to thank Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley, and their staffs, for making this hearing possible.

The debate on immigration reform has often focused on the needs of the business community. Despite the fact that immigrant women are about as likely to have a bachelor’s degree as immigrant men, and women make up 51% of migrants in the U.S., employment based visas go to men over women 3-to-1. As a result, women are far more likely to immigrate to this country under the family-based system.

But this often means that they are here as dependent spouses without the ability to work legally.

As we look to reform our immigration laws, we must consider how women and families will be affected. Historically, women have been treated as unequal in our immigration system, with citizenship tied to their husbands. In fact, 100 years ago, if a U.S. citizen woman married a non-citizen she could lose her citizenship.

I know firsthand that immigration is a women’s issue and a family issue.

My mother brought my brother and me to this country when I was a young girl to escape a terrible marriage at the hands of my father.

He was an alcoholic and compulsive gambler. I did not get to know him much.

Instead of watching our family continue to suffer, my mother made the courageous decision to seek a better life for us.

She plotted and planned in secret, and when I was nearly 8 years old...

We literally escaped to this place called Hawaii and this country called America.

It’s from my own experience as an immigrant that I believe immigration reform should make the family immigration system stronger, not weaker.

And we should not ignore the challenges immigrant women face.

The purpose of this hearing is to look at these challenges, and how we should correct these problems in the debate on Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

We will hear about immigrant women in the workplace, and the problems of exploitation that they often suffer. We will hear about the importance of family immigration to our communities and our economy. And we will hear about how Comprehensive Immigration Reform should address the integration of undocumented women and children to fully participate in society. I look forward to a great discussion.