

**Testimony of Rose Michelle Tilus Before the Senate Subcommittee on
Immigration, Citizenship and Border Safety
May 12, 2021**

My name is Rose Michelle Tilus and I am a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipient from Haiti. I have been advocating on behalf of my fellow TPS holders and Essential workers with the Haitian Bridge Alliance for over 2 years. I currently reside in Rhode Island and over the past year, I have been one of the nurses fighting on the frontlines to provide care and safeguard the lives of individuals impacted by COVID-19. I am also one of the 346,000 health care workers that are undocumented in the U.S. and one of the 130,000 estimated TPS holders who are providing essential services to our nation during this pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought unprecedented trials and challenges for all of us, and I have witnessed first-hand the loss and pain that it has brought on our patients and their families. However, my life's journey has given me the strength and resilience to offer hope to my patients during their times of great despair. My journey begins in Haiti. Growing up in Haiti, a country known for its political instability and insecurity, I lived in fear for my safety. The social and political problems impacting Haiti have steadily worsened over time. Gang violence, kidnapping and food insecurity have reached their peak. There is constant civil war with countless deaths daily. People, especially young children, are dying of famine. The government has been incapable of safeguarding the safety and well-being of its citizens. Out of fear and despair, Haitian nationals are forced to make the ultimate sacrifice and separate from their families in order to keep them safe. That was the difficult decision my parents made almost twenty years ago when they sent me abroad to live with family in the United States.

More than 20 years ago, at the age of 17, I arrived in the United States. I was forced to leave my parents and siblings, two sisters and two brothers, behind. I was suddenly alone without my family for the first time. It was a very difficult transition for me

to suddenly learn a new language, new cultures and traditions and to be separated for the first time in my life from my parents and siblings.

One of my dreams was to go to school and become a nurse to better serve my community. However, due to my lack of immigration status, I was unable to attend college. My dreams were initially crushed and my hopes shattered by the barriers that I faced simply due to my immigration status. So I did what many immigrants do in this country: I worked a few odd jobs such as babysitting and housekeeping to make ends meet.

In January 2010, a massive earthquake occurred in Haiti – killing 220,000 people, injuring more than 300,000, destroying homes, and leaving my country in ruins. Haiti was designated for Temporary Protected Status following the earthquake. For Haitian nationals, like me, this was both a relief and a blessing. After 10 years of living in the U.S., with uncertainty, I was able to obtain a work permit which allowed me to attend school. I used that opportunity to earn a degree in nursing. I graduated with my Bachelor's in 2014. I used the income I made to earn a Masters degree in 2019. I have worked in several different settings such as nursing homes, hospitals and community health centers.

During this pandemic, I have been on the frontlines both as a registered nurse and later as a nurse practitioner. Other TPS holders like myself have joined in the fight against COVID-19. It has been a difficult year fighting against the COVID virus. I have witnessed patients dying when we were helpless and limited in our ability to save them. It was a very dangerous work environment. I contracted COVID last year but thankfully have recovered since. I suffered from body aches, chills, loss of taste and smell and fever. I was out of the office recovering for 10 days. My aunt who lives with me also contracted COVID and was hospitalized for one week with respiratory difficulty and our household had to quarantine for 14 days.

Willingly and proudly, I have worked alongside other team members to fight the pandemic in our city. There was no second guessing or fear when it came to providing care to patients. As a healthcare provider, I knew it was my obligation to provide health care to those in need.

Now as a nurse practitioner, my journey continues to provide care in the midst of the pandemic through health promotion, education and most recently vaccination promotion and administration to thousands in Rhode Island. In these difficult times, immigrants have shown their support and their devotion to this country. We have stood as frontline workers knowing that there was a possibility of death. The undocumented immigrant population has played a vital role in the fight against the COVID pandemic whether it is in the food chain, cleaning staffing or in health care settings.

I have called this county my home for the past 20 years. This is the place where I received my education, where I have gotten my first job, my first car, and where I have worked to save lives. Rhode Island is the place I have learned to love, where I have built long lasting friendships and a safe community. This country means so much to me. It has given me the opportunity to be successful as a productive member of society. The US has given me a life that I could have only dreamt of in Haiti. I am able to support my family who still lives in Haiti (both my parents and siblings).

Despite all of that, I live in constant fear of deportation and/or discontinuation of my Temporary Protected Status. Having TPS has given me a life that I am so thankful for, however TPS does not grant me permanent protections that I need to remain with my loved ones, my patients and in my community. As a valuable member of the community, a frontline worker, and a taxpayer, I ask Congress to pass the Citizenship for Essential Workers Act and use every available legislative tool to create a pathway to citizenship for frontline workers. We have proven our loyalty, our love and devotion to the United States. We continue to show up when America needs us most. As we continue to deal with the challenges of COVID-19, our work will continue to remain essential in rebuilding and strengthening our communities. Now we are asking for

Congress to recognize these contributions and give us the opportunity to be recognized as full members of the American family.