

# unlikelyheroes

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
711 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

re: Letter in Support of Ana Reyes' Nomination for a vacancy on the United States District Court of the District of Columbia

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Grassley:

As founder and CEO of Unlikely Heroes, a non-profit organization devoted to rescuing and restoring child victims from sex slavery, I write in full support of Ana Reyes' application for a vacancy on the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Ana helped rescue several Nigerian girls who had been kidnapped by terrorists but managed to escape, ensuring their safe and legal passage to the United States through humanitarian parole and then asylum. The case, commonly referred to as #bringbackourgirls, is one of the highest profile cases of human trafficking to date, when Boko Haram kidnapped at gunpoint 276 girls from their school in Chibok, Nigeria. The few who escaped found their lives to be in extreme danger, as Boko Haram searched for escapees. I would like to share our story here, as it illustrates Ana's commitment to helping vulnerable individuals and capably using the legal process to do so.

After they escaped, I traveled to Nigeria to help the girls. I quickly realized we would need experienced U.S. legal counsel, and heard of Ana's stellar reputation in the field of refugee law. I reached out to ask if she could help get the girls out of harm's way and into the United States legally. Though we had never met, she said yes without hesitation. She then immediately put together a legal team at Williams & Connolly and a political communications team at Bracewell to get the girls to safety.

The stakes were extremely high because the girls' lives were continuously threatened. The young girls, considered chattel by their captors, faced grave physical harm, sexual violence, and even death if recaptured. Kept in safe houses and moved frequently, the five young girls, some only 14 years old, were scared and kept separate from their families due to safety concerns. In the United States, Ana and her team had to manage

a bureaucracy that, no matter how well intentioned, did not move quickly. She worked with Unlikely Heroes against this backdrop, knowing that time was of the essence for the safety, security, and sanity of our girls.

Ana quickly identified humanitarian parole as perhaps the only viable option that would allow the girls to travel legally to the United States. As I came to learn, however, humanitarian parole is a rarely granted measure reserved only for extraordinary cases and it is not typically used for those fleeing violence abroad. Ana and her team scoured the law and similar cases to put together compelling applications. And they simultaneously developed a strategy to work with the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to create a ripe political and legal environment for action.

There were, however, two major complicating factors. First, we had to prove that the girls actually had been ones Boko Haram kidnapped. But obtaining the necessary evidence from Nigeria was, to say the least, complicated. Not only were the girls in hiding, but they came from small villages, so it was difficult to get ahold of family and friends to confirm their identities. Second, U.S. agencies were understandably concerned about relations between the United States and Nigerian governments. Ana aptly addressed both issues. She and her team came up with creative solutions to the issue of identity, obtaining first-hand declarations from people on-the-ground and photographic evidence. And she worked relentlessly with both the State Department and DHS—which for weeks told us to go to the other for relief—to find a way to break the bureaucratic log-jam.

On Christmas Eve, the U.S. government granted each girl humanitarian parole, easily the best gift we have ever gotten. When the girls finally arrived to the United States, Ana's work for them only increased. With Ana leading the legal strategy and effort, each girl applied for, and now has, asylum. Time and again during this process, I watched Ana make decisions that protected the girls' safety above all else, even when so many others were pushing us to publicize the girls' escape to further their own political agendas. This was crucial to ensuring the girls' ability to adjust to life in the United States outside the media glare.

Ana has become so much more than our attorney, she has become our friend and ally. Today, she stays in contact with our young women, as they have graduated high school and working full-time jobs. Three are now enrolled in four-year colleges. One of the girls is even attending one of the top 100 universities in the nation where she has a 4.0 GPA and is committed to her dream of becoming a doctor. If Ana had not been there from the beginning, championing the girls and leading the way for us to navigate the many legal obstacles that we faced, I sincerely believe that these girls might not even be alive. Instead, their futures have only begun.

Unlikely Heroes is grateful for the *pro bono* representation by our ally and friend, Ana Reyes, and supports her nomination without reservation.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Emily", is positioned to the right of the text block.