

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

January 9, 2017

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

My name is Denisse Rojas Marquez and I am one of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States. I am also a recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) federal immigration program. I am writing in strong opposition of the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions for the position of Attorney General of the United States. I would like to share with you my personal story to demonstrate why Mr. Session's nomination would be detrimental to hard-working immigrants like myself.

I consider myself, an "undocumented American"; I have called the United States my home for over twenty-six years. I am also a proud Mexican, Californian, and now New Yorker. I am currently studying medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (one of the premiere medical schools in the country) and two and a half years away from becoming an MD, after which I intend to work as a doctor in underserved communities here in the United States. As you can imagine, my journey hasn't been easy: paying for college with no access to government financial aid, commuting over an hour each way to school, and the emotional tolls of feeling invisible, living in fear, and an extreme sense of isolation were just some of the obstacles I faced. However, 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 a publication in *Science*, one of the world's top academic journals.

After college, I yearned to realize my dreams of becoming a physician, to be a healer for my community. The path to how I would get there was unclear, and so, with much creativity and community support, I co-founded a national organization, called Pre-Health Dreamers, to support other undocumented students like myself that have aspirations of becoming health professionals. Among our successes was engaging with dozens of medical schools and health professional programs to open their doors to undocumented students, and co-sponsoring legislation in California to expand eligibility to professional licenses to individuals regardless of their immigration status. For three years after college I was advocating, lobbying, and writing in support of undocumented students through Pre-Health Dreamers. A personal triumph arrived when I became the first of two undocumented students to attend the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and received a \$100,000 scholarship for my personal and academic achievements. For my successes as a New American and potential to make distinctive contributions to American society, I was awarded the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans for up to \$90,000 for graduate study in April of 2016. And just last week, I was selected among 15,000 applicants for the Forbes '30 under 30' list in the Education category for being co-founder of Pre-Health Dreamers and creating more equity in education. After my departure to medical school, Pre-Health Dreamers continues to help over 700 undocumented students across the country under new leadership.

When DACA arrived in 2012, it was a relief to so many, like myself, who could continue the educational endeavors, resume their careers or even let themselves dream of becoming health professionals. It felt surreal when my DACA

approval came in the mail. Needless to say, without DACA, I would not have been able to enter medical school nor been able to receive my numerous awards and distinctions. Though I have devoted myself to my studies and activities outside the classroom, DACA was the answer that lifted the ceiling to my educational and career ambitions. I can now truly amount to anything I set myself to do. And without DACA or a long-term immigration remedy, I will not be able to practice as a doctor. DACA has allowed for the significant economic and social incorporation of undocumented persons to American society and has only served to benefit communities nationwide.

My successes are rooted in the values my family instilled in me growing up. Leaving Mexico with less than a high school education, my mother, in America, discovered 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 also 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; he loves America more than anyone I know. 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; I followed her example, she aspired to attend UC Berkeley, it became my goal too; she dreamed of becoming a doctor; I made it my own dream; and now is a researcher at UC Berkeley, with a Masters of Public Health; 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.

Unfortunately, my family and I have been tangled in an immigration system that has led to the separation of my family. In 1996, an attorney mishandled our immigration case, which resulted in a deportation order in 2001. We waited many years for an immigration reform to fix our situation, but in lost hopes, my brother in 2007 and later my mother in 2012 and father in 2014, left the U.S. to immigrate to Canada for a secure life where they could be fully incorporated as citizens. My mother, in particular, was in urgent need of medical attention and was denied health insurance in the United States. In Canada, my mother eventually received the surgery she needed. Though it was the hardest decision my mother ever made; leaving her two daughters not knowing when we would reunite again, the decision was clear, staying in U.S. would essentially mean to be denied the opportunity to live. I have decided to stay in this country because my dreams and aspirations continue to be in the United States and are made possible with with benefits DACA confers. I desire to transform healthcare systems and make quality healthcare available to all persons. There is no other place I call "home."

My family's experiences highlight the need for an immigration system that is just and humane for all hard-working families like my own. In many instances, Senator Jeff Sessions has expressed extreme anti-immigrant sentiments. His appointment as Attorney General would be devastating to millions of individuals like myself, who only desire to be fully participating members of society. Without fair and just solutions to our immigration system, my future as a physician and the aspirations and livelihood of millions of undocumented immigrants are in jeopardy. For these reasons, I strongly urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to reject the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions for the position of Attorney General of the United States.

Respectfully,

Denisse Rojas Marquez