

Testimony

Hello, my name is Audrey Lopez. I consider myself to be one of those individuals who have been blessed enough to manage to graduate from a High School and a University in this great state of Pennsylvania - a place I first arrived in 12 years ago, a place I can proudly call "home." Before coming to America I was a mediocre student, with average grades and too much of an appreciation for recess time. However, I quickly learned what my father would come to repeat numerous times since our arrival: In order for me to move forward, to make a difference, to show this country that I am of great worth, I need to get an education. This is what I have strived for since 2001.

When I finished High School I truly thought that that was it for me. Having graduated top of my class meant absolutely nothing when faced with the dark reality of the university application process. At 16, it was not only the fear of applying and maybe attracting immigration's attention and having them come deport me, it was the fear of the inability to take out loans to cover the tuition. At that point, college was simply out of reach for me - it was merely a dream. I put my dream aside and foolishly thought I could save enough money to pay for college by waiting tables. Then, as if sent from above, my cousin, who is like a sister to me, offered to help me pay for tuition. She had come to the United States years ago and joined the military, and since my father had also raised her to value education, the family took my education as an investment. I remember her saying to me, "You are the smartest in the family. If anyone deserves this, it's you." All our savings, and I'm sure most of her family's went to pay for my school tuition. I graduated last year.

It has not been easy, as many of my fellow DREAMers will tell you. It takes a strong person to get to 11th or 12th grade and find out that everything you have worked for, all

those sleepless nights writing papers, studying for exams, was for nothing – because you lack the proper documentation and the proper resources. It takes a strong person to look around and see everyone planning and stressing about which school to apply, to pick, to go to – silently wishing that was you. It takes a stubborn person to go take the SATs thinking the whole time, “Will a high score even make a difference?” It takes a strong-minded person to keep going in spite of having all the odds against you. I still remember going to my school’s guidance counselor and telling her about my status, my dreams and hopes, and begging her for help, for a way out; and in return, having her cry because she too was disheartened by my lack of options. This sort of thing can break a person; but, as you can see, by the number of us graduating from High School each year, we have not given in.

You see, I’m not here for me. It is too late for me because it is with great pride that I stand before you, a college graduate, not born but most definitely raised in Pennsylvania. I’m here for that 16 or 18 year old girl who might be graduating this June or next June and might be contemplating giving up on her dream of going to college and becoming a doctor due to fear, due to a lack of possibility because of her status. The Pennsylvania DREAM Act would help that girl retain her hopes, stay home, and contribute. A young person full of hope and dreams should never have to hear the words “Your dreams are too big;” especially not when it comes to education, something that should not be a privilege but rather, something equally accessible to all. Six years ago when I graduated from High School, I was just a girl, begging for a chance, praying and wishing for a miracle: to continue my education. I got my wish. I only ask that you give this extraordinary chance to those who are also longing for it.