

**Testimony prepared for the
United States House Committee on the Judiciary
March 6, 2019
(Washington, DC)**

Jose Palma, Coordinator, National TPS Alliance,
TPS holder, and resident of Lynn, MA

Thank you, Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jose Palma. I was born in El Salvador, however my home – and my family’s home – is in the United States. I am a father of four (4) US citizen children, and I have lived in Lynn, Massachusetts for eighteen (18) years as a TPS holder. I speak to you today as an individual, as a husband, a father, and a worker.

Importantly, I also serve as the coordinator of a beautiful alliance of TPS Holders, the National TPS Alliance representing 60 committees of TPS holders, in 27 states across the country. Today, I am representing their voices and I hope to give our claims the justice they deserve.

Defending TPS and securing permanent residency for TPS communities is an emblematic test for our time. We represent the promise of a diverse and prosperous nation; the courage of immigrant families that have thrived in America; the example of hard work and strong families upon which strong communities have always been built.

I know the members of the committee understand, these are not things to fear. These are the shared values that we all know we should celebrate. These values are things we should cherish and defend. That is what is at stake.

We ask that you look at us, beyond the politics beyond the sound bites and rhetoric. With more than half a million TPS holders and their families on the verge of being separated, we ask that you look at our humanity and hear our stories.

My hope is that you will see how our story is no different from that of millions of Americans who have established roots, are strong foundations in their communities, and are fighting to ensure their families are safe and protected. I’d like you to have a clear idea of who TPS holders are.

I also would like you to know why the term “temporary” is no longer an appropriate term or category for our communities across the nation. We have given the best years of our lives in this country.

When the Trump administration began to terminate legal status for TPS holders across the nation, families across the country had to confront the reality, and in response we built an inspiring coalition that is standing up for the thirteen (13) countries that have had TPS in recent years.

The National TPS Alliance has coordinated with our partner organizations to file the lawsuit that has so far blocked the Trump administration's termination of TPS for El Salvador, Haiti, Sudan, and Nicaragua, and we are currently litigating to secure protections for TPS holders from Nepal and Honduras. A preliminary injunction has now given some of us until January 2, 2020, but we know that a federal court's preliminary injunction does not give justice to our families and, in any event, is not stable. Permanent residency is what we seek.

We have been involved in the revival of local economies, contributed to the social fabric of hundreds of towns across the country, undergone rigorous background checks, paid taxes, purchased homes, paid mortgages, and raised American--born children. I can assure you that our lives and our stories are anything but temporary.

JOSE'S STORY: "YOUR EDUCATION IS YOUR FUTURE"

I invite you to picture my life as a young ten-year-old child from a town square in El Salvador. I would shine people's shoes all morning every day, because my parents lost everything in the Civil War, and they needed me to work to afford food and to sustain our humble home.

At noon every day I would leave work and go to school, because my parents would say, "your education is your future." Even though neither of them knew how to read or write they knew their child needed a better future and that future was in school. **That dream became the boy's dream too.**

I soon realized that even though I worked so hard and loved my family and country, there was no other choice. I was forced to leave El Salvador as a result of a devastating civil war, multiple earthquakes, and other natural disasters, which produced unbearable social and economic conditions.

One doesn't just wake up one day wanting to leave their home country and their family, there are long standing conditions that make it unbearable to live.

I was first granted TPS in 2001, when I was 25. We were given 18 months to work, to get our affairs in order and anything beyond that was unthinkable. However, as the years passed I began working, I obtained an associate's degree in Paralegal studies from North Shore Community College and was awarded the distinguished alumni award. After meeting the love of my life, who also has TPS, we had our son Kevin, who is now getting ready to apply to colleges – hoping to become a cardiologist. Like other fathers I am helping him fill out his application and hope to continue supporting him throughout his career. Now, 18 years have passed and my home is in Lynn, Massachusetts.

For the last 18 years, our lives have been measured in 18-month periods. Background checks, application fees, visits to DHS offices – we've always done everything we've been asked to do to be protected from deportation and to continue working and supporting our family. But after so

many years, we simply began to live our lives and to build our homes where we were. This is our home now.

But today, since the TPS program was terminated, our lives have been on hold and in limbo. I only have 9 months left before I'm permanently separated from my children. Kevin will be in his first semester in university. Like me, hundreds of thousands of TPS holders and their families are living in fear and with anxiety every day.

STORIES OF THE TPS EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA:

My story is not an isolated case. TPS families across the country have amazing stories that exemplify the values that every member of this committee cherishes. Who are these men and women that are giving a voice to TPS families?

- When New Orleans was flooded after Hurricane Katrina, TPS holders were among the workers that took on the often risky reconstruction challenges and helped rebuild the city.
- A father who worked on the reconstruction of the Pentagon after the national tragedy of September 11 and works on government projects within some of our most cherished institutions was also a TPS recipient.
- A TPS recipient is a hotel worker that proudly calls Las Vegas, Nevada her home, and is the mother of 3 U.S.-born children.
- A business owner in Boston who employs dozens of Americans with well-paid jobs, and runs a multi-million dollar construction business holds TPS from El Salvador.
- The Nepali nail salon worker in New York City that sees and greets people every day has TPS.
- The bridge builder in Maryland, who is responsible for ensuring that drivers from the region cross safely every day, has TPS.
- In Dallas, a TPS holder that is an auto-mechanic has a son who will be joining the U.S. Marine in the next a few weeks.
- In Richmond, CA, a young 14 year old – US born daughter of a TPS holder is spearheading a legal effort to demand transparency in the termination of the program and to ensure that we are also treated fairly.

THE IMPACT ON OUR CHILDREN

For 18 years I, along with my wife Mayra, have been raising four beautiful US-citizen kids, who are now dreaming about their education and futures.

Kevin, my oldest son turned 18 last week. He's about to graduate and he is applying to universities, hoping to become a cardiologist. Angela, my 13 year old, is a part of every club possible at school and dreams about being a physical therapist. Our 3 year old Ezequiel, is about to go to Pre-K and we have a 7-month-old baby girl Valentina whose greatest gift to my life is her beautiful smile.

Everyday, I hear stories of immigrants being detained and deported from this country. I have heard these for years under all administrations. And while it has always been a concern, I have never succumbed to as much anxiety as I have in the last year and a half when terminations were issued to this critical program.

I think about my children more than anything. What is to happen to them? They are US citizens, most of them have never been to El Salvador and my oldest, in his application to colleges, is planning to spend his professional life here.

There are over 275,000 American children¹ with TPS parents from El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras alone. We have all witnessed the pain and suffering that family separation causes and the great impact and trauma it can have on children. Family separation--not only the separation of kids at the border but from within communities all throughout this country--will be regarded as a stain on this country.

There is a growing contingent of US-born children that are advocating on the behalf of their parents and family members, working with legislators from across the country to ensure a permanent solution and a pathway to normalizing ones legal status.

If we cannot find a permanent solution I'll be forced to look down the barrel of family separation on top of leaving my life behind to start over in a country I no longer know. Everything will be upended.

Our TPS families were easy targets because what is evident has not been resolved: We have made our homes here. Today, we cannot simply extend TPS, we seek permanent residency here in the place we've called home for decades.

Like me, hundreds of thousands of families with children who call this country their own are raising their voices to ensure that we know their plight and are doing everything possible to protect them.

¹ CAP analysis of 2017 one-year American Community Survey microdata. Data accessed via Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2017 American Community Survey: 1-year estimates" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2018), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>. This measure includes children under the age of 18 who are U.S. citizens living in a household with a family member who holds TPS. Data reflect TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti, making up 94 percent of all TPS holders.

WORKING TOWARD PERMANET SOLUTION:

Immigrants are the fabric of the U.S., so many young children across generation after generation, those dreams like mine, like my son's will continue to make the country strong and respected. My dream is one of 450,000 families across the country. Let us not destroy the dreams we are planting and have already planted. Let's grow together!

The social fabric of the United States of America is made up of workers, teachers, scientists, business owners, families and more - this is who TPS holders are. The reality I share with you today is that TPS holders and our families genuinely love this country, our home, and we have contributed and rooted in our communities for many years.

Our lives are not temporary. Our lives are very real and what is real today is that over 450,000 TPS families are at risk of being the next wave of family separation. What is very real today is that over 80% of TPS holders² are part of America's workforce and right now according to the U.S Department of Labor's 2019 numbers there are over 7.3 million jobs³ needed to be filled-losing skilled labor workforce is not how we strengthen our country. What is also very real today is that only Congress has the power to address a plan to ensure that TPS holders and our families are able to remain permanently in the U.S so that America's values of integrity and family preservation win.

Let us not destroy the contributions that our U.S citizen children and us as TPS holders from Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Nepal, Haiti, Sudan, Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia have built.

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and every Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.

² Warren, Robert, and Donald Kerwin. "A Statistical and Demographic Profile of the US Temporary Protected Status Populations from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti." Center for Migration Studies of New York, July 2017, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/233150241700500302.

³ "Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12 Feb. 2019, www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm.