



## Opening Statement

My name is Linda Rivas, for the past 5 years I have served at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center. Las Americas is a local organization dedicated to serving the needs of asylum seekers for the past 32 years. We are unwavering in our passion and in our mission. This year this conviction forced us to travel to Mexico in order to continue our mission to help asylum seekers under the harmful Remain in Mexico policy. For years we worked to strengthen our detention center infrastructure when suddenly our resources had to be diverted to Mexico. Less than a week after the ill named Migrant Protection Protocol had been rolled out, Las Americas phones started ringing off the hook. Our inclusion on a DOJ list that DHS was providing migrants provided people stuck in Mexico with our phone number. (Please see "List of Pro Bono Legal Service Providers" Updated on July 2019.) To this day we have registered over 600 phone calls. We have conducted over 300 legal intakes across the border, we have successfully released 40 people from the MPP program based on vulnerabilities or fear to return to Mexico and we have taken on 10 cases for full legal representation thus far. Just two days ago, I visited my client, Gaby, who has an asylum hearing on September 30. She told me, "Abogada ya no puedo" "Attorney, I can't anymore" Her child, Sophia had been diagnosed with childhood anorexia. But the doctor could not be certain because Gaby did not have the money to conduct more tests. "My daughter comes first; I cannot endure this." This political asylum seeker from Honduras who had been kidnapped several times in Mexico yet failed her "Non-Refoulment Interview" (the only safety mechanism built into MPP, with an extremely high burden of proof) not once but 3 times was finally at her breaking point. She was determined to take a bus back home. Even having an attorney was not enough to keep her wanting to fight her case. She told me this must be what the US government wanted, but no one wins. Instead everyone loses. She will return to Honduras and live in a new town, a smaller town where she doesn't know anyone, except distant relatives of her husband. Meanwhile her husband will remain in New York. Although they traveled together with both their children, they were separated by Border Patrol. Gaby, my client and Sophia, her 6-year-old daughter, were sent to Juarez. Her husband and 7-year-old son were released and allowed to travel to New York. Gaby said, "I still cannot make sense of why this happened, the last time we were together was when we were sleeping on gravel, rocks and construction material under a bridge, then we were separated for no reason." Gaby has given up; she is far from the only one. Weekly, buses full of asylum seekers go back to their countries of origin. Like Gaby, some have accepted to return to live in hiding. It is easier to hide in a country you know that in a country you do not know. Gaby's story and so many others who we have accompanied for the past 23 weeks highlight just how cruel and horrific MPP is.