



Statement for the Record

**Collection of Personal Statements from
Members of Improve The Dream**

**Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee's
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship**

“Why Don't They Just Get in Line?’ Barriers to Legal Immigration”

Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Anagh Kulkarni:

My name is Anagh Kulkarni. I'm currently a sophomore at the Ohio State University majoring in biomedical science and minoring in business. I am a Documented Dreamer.

Having resided in this country for 18 years, American culture is what I know best. I'm a huge fan of the Buckeyes, my thinking voice speaks exclusively English, and if someone gives me a temperature in Celsius, I have to convert it to Fahrenheit before I know whether it's hot or cold. I've always considered myself American in every conceivable way.

My parents brought me to this country when I was two years old. Both of them were first generation immigrants, leaving behind their entire families, their country, and all sense of familiarity for the sole purpose of my future. The American higher-education system was revered throughout the world, and in order to allow me to experience such an education, my parents sacrificed everything that they had.

As a toddler, I lived in Boston, Massachusetts, but because of my dad's visa status, he was limited in his career options, and so forced to be extremely flexible with his job. This meant that we moved around a lot when I was young. I didn't even know it then, but the immigration system was already beginning to affect me. Moving around as a young child is difficult. Adjusting to a new home, new people, and a new environment every couple of years was something that I eventually grew used to, but for a long time I struggled with attachment. To this day, I find it difficult to maintain long-term connections with distanced peers, and that's something that I am actively working to improve. As it stands, I do fondly remember my young life in distinct segments, each with memories that I wish to re-experience, places I wish to revisit and people with whom I would love to reconnect.

At the beginning of Kindergarten, my family moved to an apartment in Jersey City, New Jersey. I fondly remember my friends from then: Bryce, Alex, Shania, CiCi, Yash, Neil, Arjun... and even my kindergarten crush, a girl named Anastasia. I planted the seeds of my future then, starting to play competitive chess and joining a Karate school, two activities that I enjoy to this very day. We moved again for third and fourth grade to Dublin, Ohio, and I made some of my oldest friends, picking up a few karate and soccer trophies, and going to state tournaments in chess. Finally, my dad received a job offer that would allow us to settle down in one location, an offer that put us in the city that I, to this day, consider home: Mason, Ohio.

Mason was where I completed my education from 5th-12th grade. It was where I chipped my first tooth, drove my first car, and had my first kiss. Mason was where I really grew up. And Mason was when I first realized that my future was not going to be an easy journey,

The first wake-up call was at the age of 16, when I started looking for a summer job to buy myself a nicer laptop for school. I realized then that as a H4 child dependent without a work permit, I couldn't legally be paid. Conversations about my family's pending green card had permeated the household for years now, but it was at this point that I started understanding why they always seemed to be accompanied by an aura of hopelessness.

However, I still hadn't fully comprehended my situation by this time, so I decided to just work even harder to fulfill my academic and extracurricular goals. and ended up graduating high-school with a 4.970 GPA a perfect 36 ACT score, and a National Merit title. I participated in community service, putting over 200 hours into my local hospital as a volunteer and even more in a nearby retirement home. I became the event leader for my public forum debate team, and ended up qualifying to Nationals as a senior after winning nearly all of the regional tournaments that year. My list of chess achievements grew longer, as I consecutively placed in the top 10 in my grade at nationals. I obtained my black belt in martial arts after 10+ years of intensive training and having to restart from the beginning every time I moved. In each of these activities, I wanted to succeed. But even more than that, I wanted to make my parents proud.

It was here in high school that I first developed my interest in medicine. While doing research for a debate tournament, I found myself unable to stop reading about the inequities that existed throughout the healthcare system. Insurance was ineffective, drug prices were extremely high, and people were suffering. Increasing not only the quantity of treatments, but their accessibility was an often forgotten part of healthcare, and as a doctor I hoped to change that. I wanted to travel to impoverished communities, restoring within them hope that'd been long lost, all at little to no cost. I wanted to make a difference in someone's life.

With these thoughts in mind, I started applying to colleges. However, as I spoke to university representatives, I found out that almost none of my efforts thus far had mattered anyway. As an "international student", I would be automatically disqualified from any merit-based scholarships, financial aid, or in many cases, even in-state tuition. My achievements in high-school were worth next to nothing, because in a world where college tuition was growing faster than my mom's garden plants, a jobless high-school graduate with no personal savings had limitations.

That being said, I was fortunate enough to qualify for an exceptional pre-medicine program at Ohio State University, and after a back-and-forth with administration, secured in-state tuition as well. I became heavily involved at OSU, pursuing every opportunity that I could to further my aspirations. Even though I still couldn't qualify for jobs or internships, I decided to get involved in volunteering-based organizations so that I could still give back to my community.

I joined an organization called Scientific Thinkers, where my role as Lessons Committee Chair was to develop science lessons that we took to underprivileged schools to present to their

students. I started tutoring for an organization called ClassMates, designed to help disadvantaged students that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. I became heavily involved in my cancer research lab, in which one project explored the impact of racial and economic disparities on rates of breast cancer. I joined ENCompass, an organization that focuses on helping impoverished community members with financial factors that influence the efficacy of their medical treatments.

I'm involved in all of these organizations to this day, and they have only strengthened my resolve to pursue making a change in the healthcare system. But even while researching medical schools, I was faced with the stark reality of my situation.

The knock-out blow came in the form of a couple of statistics. A study by InGenius Prep of AAMC data shows that two-thirds of medical schools in the United States do not accept international students without exception. Further damning is the fact that the acceptance rate for international students nationally is around 8%, a stark contrast from the 41% that domestic students face.

The air left my sails.

As of last January, I'm twenty. I dread growing any older. While turning 21 is generally a celebration of adulthood, for me, it's more akin to an expiration date. At 21, I age out of my status. And now that I'm mere months away, I find myself wondering if there is any point to the hundreds and thousands of hours that I've worked to make myself a valuable member of society. In moments of weakness, I often find myself in a cycle of despair, losing more motivation with every passing month, finding it difficult to focus on my grades, my involvements, and my goals. I have two questions that often fall on deaf ears. "*What did I do to deserve this,*" has no answer, and "*Why does anything matter anymore,*" struggles to escape the quick "*It doesn't*" that follows.

And yet, I've not given up my dreams. My parents didn't raise me to be a quitter, and I owe it to them to keep swimming. As an active member of Improve The Dream, I will fight to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of kids like me don't have to undergo the same struggle that I have to this point. I fight for my future, but I also fight for theirs.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I hope that you can take this into consideration to remove barriers that exist for children growing up in the United States.

Lakshmi Parvathinathan:

Most American teenagers look forward to turning 21, but I dread it. I am American in every way except on paper. and turning 21 means that I will age out of the system and have to fight to stay in this country, a country that has become home to me.

My name is Lakshmi Parvathinathan and I am a Documented Dreamer.

I was born in Tamil Nadu, India and my parents brought me to Dallas, Texas when I was just three years old. I didn't know it at the time, but Dallas would be home only for the next five years - how long our L1B visas would be valid. I grew up 25 minutes away from the Cowboys Stadium and I cherished the sweltering summers and merciful winters that came with Texas. I went to school in Dallas from pre-k to third grade, but three months into third grade I was torn away from everything I ever knew. Our L1A visa extension got denied. I had only a few weeks to tell my friends and teachers that I was moving halfway across the world to a country that I didn't remember.

For the next two years, I had to adjust to life in India. During my first six months there, I spent hours after school everyday with a tutor learning how to read and write Tamil, a language with 247 characters, just to pass the third grade. At school, I faked an Indian accent and smiled awkwardly when my native friends praised me for my "perfect" English. I somehow managed to feel like a foreigner in the very country I was born in.

When fifth grade rolled around, so did my chance to come back to America. This time, home was the suburbs of Philadelphia. Now that I was older, my parents decided to be transparent about our visa status. When I started middle school, they warned me that our L1B visa would only allow us to stay for five years, which meant that I might have to move back to India again during high school. But they told me there was a chance that we could stay longer if we won a lottery: the H1B lottery. Winning the H1B lottery would mean that I could complete at least high school in America. On top of angsty tween drama, my middle school experience was plagued with constant uncertainty. The odds were not in our favor the first time to applied to the lottery-we were met with a rejection. Our second application resulted in the same fate. We started losing hope about our future in America. Facing rejection repeatedly was emotionally draining, but my parents refused to relent and tried again. As a final attempt, we applied one more time. This time, the odds were in our favor and we won the H1B lottery when I was in the ninth grade. I thought this meant that my future in this country was secured. I could not have been more wrong.

By the next year, I learned about all the disheartening limitations that came with my status: I don't qualify for federal aid or in-state tuition, I don't have work authorization, and I can't easily

pursue a career in healthcare the same way my peers can. Worst of all, I found out that I might have to self-deport from the country that I proudly call home when I turn 21.

My enthusiasm for my future quickly turned into fear. Growing up in a community with few immigrants, the lack of a solid support system made me feel incredibly alienated. No one I knew could understand what I was going through, and I began to question everything. Despondent thoughts consumed me, forcing me to constantly worry about my future and feel so utterly powerless. Nothing felt in my control anymore; the American Dream that I had spent all these years in school learning about seemed like a lie.

I am now a Biological Sciences major at Drexel University, still working to chase my dream of entering the medical field. I recently joined Improve The Dream, and for the first time ever, I feel like there is finally hope for me and the 200,000 other Documented Dreamers like me. We will continue to advocate for all Dreamers to ensure that no child has to ever face self-deportation. We are Dreamers too, and we just want to be given a real chance to chase our American Dream.

Hwanhee (Hilary) Yoon:

My name is Hwanhee (Hilary) Yoon. I'm seventeen years old, and I'm currently a junior in high school. I am a documented dreamer.

My parents brought me and my siblings to the US from South Korea when I was just ten months old. Due to the lack of pathways to citizenship, I am still on a temporary visa though I have never left the United States since moving here almost 17 years ago. America is all I've ever known—I'm more comfortable speaking English than Korean, and because I was so young when I left Korea, I don't remember a single thing about the country. Everything that I know about Korea is what I've learned growing up here in the U.S.

My parents grew up in Korea and their reason for moving to the US was because my dad's company had sponsored his Master's degree in public administration in the U.S. During my dad's three-year masters program, my parents realized that this is the place where they wanted to raise me and my siblings, as the education system in Korea is extremely stressful and competitive. My parents wanted us to be able to play sports, learn how to play instruments, hangout with friends and have fun while growing up, rather than studying from morning to night everyday. However, my dad had an obligation to return to the company. Though it was a difficult decision, my mom decided to stay in the U.S. to raise us while my dad worked in Korea. As a result, our family reunited only once or twice a year for a few years until my dad eventually left his company and moved to the U.S. to be with us. My parents decided to start running a small business on an E2 visa. They started with a small cafe in Portland, Oregon without any prior experience in running a business. They had given up their jobs, left their family and friends, and took a chance at making a living here in the U.S. so that my siblings and I could have a more positive upbringing.

When I started kindergarten, I remember no one in my class could pronounce my name correctly. The first thing my family and I did was research English names so that my siblings and I would have an easier time while going through school. I remember always being embarrassed whenever someone asked me what my "real" name was, or when my parents would speak Korean to me in front of my friends. I wanted to be 'normal' and have the life that every American kid got to experience. My parents gave me just that. I was involved in almost all the activities and clubs that my elementary school offered - I ran track, I was in student council, I played in band, I sang in choir, and I was involved in volunteer activities when there were such opportunities. Outside of school I received piano lessons, I was in figure skating and played on a basketball team. When I entered middle school I was involved in school leadership, played volleyball, basketball, ran track, and was a member of the National Honor Society. I am now in high school, and I am still involved in leadership, National Honor Society, and had the privilege of being the President of Key Club. I have also been on varsity basketball and golf teams since freshman year. Through all

these activities my parents were there, giving me rides, coming to my games and matches, all the while supporting my two siblings and running their business.

Growing up, I've seen my whole family struggle due to the lack of permanent residency in America—my parents working tirelessly for as long as I can remember in fear of denial of E-2 Visa renewal and in turn losing the residency status for our entire family—my sister crying due to the limitations she faced as a student when deciding on a major to pursue, and applying for jobs and finding out that numerous companies only consider applicants that are green card holders or citizens—my brother who left the U.S. when his visa expired.

I remember the numerous conversations my parents had to have with me, explaining that we might have to leave America and that everything would be okay no matter what happened, that they would figure out a way for me to stay in the U.S. I watch my parents act fine, when I know how much it hurts them to see everything that my siblings and I have to go through. They watch us cry about what the future might hold, while they are acting strong for us--when they haven't seen their parents and siblings for over 12 years. Even though my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer and my grandfather's health is worsening, my parents have not had a chance to go to Korea to be with them all because of me--they do not want to jeopardize losing the E-2 Visa status because that would mean that I would have to move out of the country I call home.

Now that I will be applying to colleges in less than a year, I am fearful of what I will be facing. I had never thought about not attending college, but now I realize that whether or not I could go to college solely depends on whether my parents could afford expensive international student college tuition. My attending college would require my parents' sacrifice not only financially, but also the time they could spend with my grandparents in Korea in poor health. If it weren't for me, my parents could spend time with them and be able to rest--they have worked tirelessly for as long as I can remember and I wish that I didn't need their sacrifice.

I feel American and I grew up just like my American friends around me. I only wish that I could also have the same opportunities as them.

Padma Danturty:

My name is Padma, I'm 18 years old and I'm a senior in high school. When I was 8 months old, I took a life changing flight from Mumbai, India to the Boston Airport. This was my first flight ever, and was the beginning of my life in America—the only life I've ever known.

Growing up, I always saw myself as every other American. My friends and I played in our backyards together, learned in the same classrooms, and our parents were friends. I grew up speaking English, playing on a local girl's soccer team, dressing up barbie girl dolls, and enjoying fast food.

My favorite activity of all time, though, was visiting an arcade called Putt Putt Fun House, in Houston Texas, with my dad. I loved to rock climb, play laser tag, and play Deal or No Deal at the arcade. In the 2nd grade, I decided to have my 8th birthday party there, and I invited every single person in my class. I relished being with my closest friends in the place that I loved, and had some of my fondest memories with them. I had found my people, after years of being a shy kid.

Another frequent activity of mine was playing house with my friends during recess. Whatever I was, the mother, the child, the secret agent, I imagined my life 20 years from then, living in the US. I thought we were all in the same boat, as Americans.

When I was in middle school, we visited Canada. I thought we were going on a small vacation, until I came to understand that we needed to visit the American Embassy in Ottawa, in order to get our multiple entry visa. I was confused, but they told me we needed to go there in order to come back “home” in the US. It was then that my parents explained that I'm not like every other American. As an Indian immigrant, I remained on a H-4 visa dependent on my mom's work, even though we applied for residency in 2013. I realized living on an H-4 visa, waiting in an endless line for a Green Card, has major drawbacks. Every 2 or 3 years, I have to file for an extension for our visa, despite the fact that I've lived here for 18 years. Each time is anxiety-inducing for me and my family, as we never know if we will be denied and sent back “home.” This was particularly scary for me because I had no memory of India, yet it is technically considered my place of permanent residence.

Throughout high school, I've tried to embrace the American culture that I've grown up with. I joined my school's marching band, and at every home football game, I proudly play the star spangled banner on my saxophone with the rest of my American friends. I work hard in school, and do what I can to volunteer and give back to my community. However, I learned that I can't work, get a normal driver's license, or accept most scholarships for college. Worst of all, I could be deported at age 21 if I don't switch to another visa and start the immigration process all over.

Even if I do switch to a student visa in college, I would be considered “international,” and my entire existence growing up in America wouldn’t matter or be accounted for.

My best friends talk excitedly about going to university, earning money over the summer, and even voting. I can’t do any of these things, despite us having many of the same experiences in America. I recently committed to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and I look forward to majoring in Neuroscience, and becoming a scientific researcher; but I’m scared. I don’t want to leave what I consider to be my nation.

I hope one day I can truly call the only country I’ve ever known “home.”

Sumana Kaluvai:

We came to America when I was two. My father worked as an engineer for several different tech companies. I've always felt like an American. My parents told me that I could be anything I wanted. I do remember them saying I couldn't get a job when I turned sixteen, but I assumed it was a typical Indian household protecting their daughter. So I focused all my energy into making good grades and getting into college. I finished my applications early. But when I showed them to my mom, she zoned in on one particular part. 'Be sure to mark that you're an international student,' she said.

She explained that because of my H4 visa status, the selection process would be much tougher. And I wouldn't qualify for financial aid or scholarships. Soon I found out I couldn't get a State ID, or pay instate tuition or do any internships. Worst of all I would have to self deport when I was 21. I was devastated. I'd done everything right and pushed myself in school. I was even a national champion in artistic roller skating. But none of that seemed to matter. There was a chance I couldn't even go to college in America.

I've had to make every decision based on what gives me the best chance of staying in the country. It's like I'm always playing a game. And if I mess up once, I'll need to leave. For a long time I carried a lot of anger. I was jealous of my younger brother for being born here. I was mad at my parents for not telling me. But both of them were born in a village. They gave up so much to be here. They went years at a time without seeing their families. How could I be mad when they sacrificed so much? I think they were afraid of discouraging me. They were focused on me being OK in the moment, and they assumed it would all work out.

The American Dream is so well marketed. And when you get here, it feels so close. Like if you just work hard—everything will fall into place. I have 16 months left before my OPT is over and I'm not sure what the future holds for me after it expires. But I know one thing is for sure, me calling America home will not be over then.

Adhithya Rajasekaran:

First, I want to convey my sincere gratitude to the people of this beautiful country for providing me and my family with safe refuge and incredible opportunities. The United States has always been a country of immigrants. But the immigration system has unfortunately not kept up with the times and needs serious reform. One immigration issue that is close to my heart is the struggles of Documented Dreamers in this country. I am one of them and this is my story.

I was born in Chennai, India. I come from a poor family of priests. We sustained our day-to-day lives from the donations devotees offered to the temple. My mom grew up in abject poverty. But she had enormous willpower and perseverance. She taught herself English by reading old English newspapers, studied day and night and was able to get admission to a top college. She went on to get two PhDs (one in chemistry and one in education) and she is one of the smartest people that I have ever known in my life. She has been a science educator for more than 30 years. She has several peer-reviewed publications and has helped lots of women get PhDs as a guide.

In 2004, my mom was recruited to come and teach in the United States. She eventually got a permanent teaching job in 2007 and got an H1B visa. She brought my sister and I to the US on H4 dependent children visas. That is how I came to the US. Our family eventually settled in Covington, Georgia where my sister and I enrolled in school.

When I came to the US, I did not speak English well. English is my third language. So, I was placed in the ESOL program. I did even know the words “visa”, “immigration”, “H1B”, “green card” or any of the other terms that I use in this testimony. With the help of amazing teachers and exceedingly kind and empathetic American friends, I was eventually able to speak English fluently and I eventually went on to study and pass the AP British Literature exam and get college credit for it. I was a good student. I took AP classes. I was eventually inducted into the National Honors Society. Service to others was always emphasized to me even as a little child. So, I joined the Beta club and volunteered every weekend. I was also part of the team that won the Georgia Academic Bowl Championship in 2011. The Georgia state legislature decided to honor our team by passing a resolution and I have a signed copy from the governor, and it is one of my proudest possessions.

My mom’s employer sponsored her for permanent residence in 2010 under the employment-based immigration system. But because my mom had the misfortune of being born in India, she was subject to the per country cap of 7% and was unable to receive permanent residency. She has been stuck in the backlog ever since. We have family friends who were born in countries other than India. Many of them came to the US around the same time as my mom or later and almost all of them are US citizens and they have voted in at least two if not three presidential elections. But my mom has been unable to even receive her green card.

The first time I learnt that I was not like my American friends is when I went to get my learner's permit. My American friend was getting his and his mom took me with him. My application was denied, and I was told that I had to produce additional documents because I was an "alien". I eventually came to know that my stay in this country was limited, and I could not do a lot of things that my American friends could do like take summer jobs.

I graduated in the top 10 of my graduating class. I have been dreaming of becoming an engineer ever since I was a little kid. Georgia Tech was my top choice as it was one of the best engineering schools in the entire country and it was in my backyard. They also offered automatic admission to students who graduate in the top 10 from any Georgia school. But I soon realized I would not be able to afford Georgia Tech because of my immigration status.

Even though I was a resident of the state of Georgia, I had a driver's license issued by the state, I had graduated from a Georgia high school and my mom worked for a public educational institution in Georgia, I was still classified as an out of state student. This meant that I had to pay out of state tuition, which was closer to \$50,000 for a single year. Putting one kid through college is already hard enough for most American families. Putting two kids through college and paying out of state tuition was not possible for my family. I distinctly remember sitting outside of the Georgia Tech registrar's office crying and not knowing what to do next.

My helpful high school counselor told me to fill out the FAFSA form because she had seen other children from poor families get money from the federal government. But because of my immigration status, I did not qualify for any federal student aid like Pell grants or student loans. I went to apply for a private student loan from a bank. The bank asked for my social security number (SSN) and I had none because H4 children are not work authorized in the US and are not provided with SSNs. I also didn't qualify for any state scholarships like the merit-based Hope or Zell Miller scholarship that the state of Georgia provided to students because of my immigration status.

A close friend of mine who knew my struggles was enlisting in the US army. He put me in touch with a recruiter for the US army. The US army had a shortage of translators for certain languages, and they had a shortage of translators who can translate Tamil, my native language. The recruiter mentioned that if I joined the US army as a translator, I could receive US citizenship and receive the GI bill to pay for college through the MAVNI program. I wanted to join. But due to a pre-existing medical condition, I eventually received a permanent disqualifier from ever enlisting in US military service.

Eventually, I decided to go to a community college called Georgia Perimeter College (now part of Georgia State University). My mom scrapped every bit of money she had to provide for my community college tuition. They did not have an engineering program at that time. So, I decided to study Mathematics. I continued my volunteer work every weekend. I was inducted into the honors program, rose to the leadership of several different clubs, and led delegations to

Washington D.C on a wide variety of issues. I ran for the student government and became the vice president. I graduated in 2013 with an A.A degree in Mathematics with honors. I wanted to transfer back to Georgia Tech to get my engineering degree. But I still did not have money to pay for out-of-state tuition.

While I was at Georgia Perimeter College, the Obama administration came out with the DACA program. I am in full support of the DACA program. I have friends in the DACA community, and I personally know how much the program has transformed their lives. I am very thankful that the administration came out with the DACA program. But the administration included a requirement that individuals should have “no lawful status on June 15, 2012” to qualify. Since my mom renewed my visa and kept my lawful status on that date, I and others in my situation did not qualify. This meant that we did not have any protections from deportation like those in the DACA program had.

In April 2013, my life changed forever. A private foundation in Washington D.C named the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation named me as a scholar. They told me that I can go study whatever I want in whichever college I want, and they would cover the cost. With the financial backing of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, I was finally able to get to Georgia Tech. I thought I had conquered all the problems. But little did I know that my troubles because of my status were just beginning.

Since scholarships are considered taxable, Georgia Tech reported my “income” to the IRS. But I couldn’t file taxes on my own as I didn’t have a SSN. So, I was forced to add all my “income” to my mom’s income and file taxes through her. This resulted in her income doubling immediately and resulting in huge tax bills for her.

Georgia Tech is a world class research university. I wanted to get involved in research. But since I had no work authorization, I could not work as a research assistant. Georgia Tech also had a startup incubator where students can join and start companies. I wanted to start my own company based on a research project that I had done for a class. But I could not do it.

In early 2015, my mom was in a bad car accident. She injured her neck and spinal cord and was in a serious condition. Doctors were asking who her next of kin is and who can make medical decisions about her life. That is when I came to the realization that my status in this country was tied to my mom and if something happened to her, I would not only be losing my mom, but I would also be deported out of this country and lose everything that I have worked hard for all this time. My mom is a fighter. She eventually recovered. But she is unable to drive today.

H4 visas cannot be extended past age 21. But I did not have enough credits to graduate before I turned 21. So, I started exploring other options. F1 (student visa) was the only option that allowed me to study. But F1 visas have a requirement that the applicant must have a residence abroad that he/she has no intention of abandoning. Since my entire family had moved to the US

and my mom had a permanent job in the US, we had no residence abroad. I talked to immigration lawyers, and they told me that I do not qualify for F1. But I wanted to study. So, I self-filed my F1 application as no immigration lawyers were willing to take my case that they knew was going to end up in denial. I did not hear back from USCIS for months. I was super fortunate. My application was eventually approved. But many others are not that fortunate, and they must self-deport themselves out of this country.

I graduated from Georgia Tech in December 2015 with a B.S in Electrical Engineering with highest honors. My mom had two PhDs. I wanted to get at least one PhD. I was immediately admitted to graduate school at Georgia Tech and the Jack Kent Cooke foundation once again offered me their full financial support until I got my PhD. But my mom's health was in decline. So, I decided to put my PhD dreams on hold, and I finished my M.S in Electrical and Computer Engineering in one semester and I graduated in May 2016.

Microsoft recruited me out of Georgia Tech, and I moved to Washington state to work for them. I have been working at Microsoft for the last four years. I currently work as a Software Engineer on the Word team and my areas of expertise are performance and accessibility. Microsoft applied for an H1B visa, and I am on that right now. I lost my pathway to citizenship when I turned 21. I was kicked out of my mom's permanent residency application.

I was extremely fortunate. There were so many people who provided me with their time and other resources to help me on my journey. I am incredibly grateful to them. I also know that I was super lucky to have an opportunity to study computer science and engineering. But I am acutely aware that lots of children (especially in rural communities) in this country do not have that opportunity. So, I have been a volunteer high school computer science teacher for the last three years through the TEALS program. I have been teaching at Mabton High School in Mabton, WA. It has been one of the most fulfilling things that I have done in my life. My family and I also started a scholarship program at Georgia State University to provide a scholarship that has no immigration status requirements. The Rajasekaran family scholarship will start providing scholarships starting in Fall 2021.

I really want to commend the members of this committee for including people like me in the recently passed bipartisan American and Dream Promise Act. But people like me are still excluded from the senate version of the Dream Act and executive programs like the DACA program still exclude documented dreamers just because of the fact they are documented.

My sincere hope is that distinguished members of this committee can come together in a bipartisan way to provide a pathway to citizenship for all children who grew up here and call America home. I also hope that this committee can find bipartisan solutions for other immigration issues that plague the employment based immigration system. Thanks for taking the time to read my story and thanks for the opportunity to share it.