



**Testimony of Pareen Mhatre  
Student  
Member, Improve The Dream**

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

**Hearing on “‘Why Don’t They Just Get in Line?’ Barriers to Legal  
Immigration”  
April 28, 2021**

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member McClintock, and members of the subcommittee, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you.

My name is Pareen Mhatre. I am currently a third-year biomedical engineering student at the University of Iowa. I am also a member of Improve The Dream, a youth-led advocacy organization bringing awareness for more than 200,000 children of long-term visa holders who face self-deportation,<sup>1</sup> even though we have grown up in the United States with a documented status. We are advocating for change that permanently ends "aging-out" of the immigration system,<sup>2</sup> and provides a pathway to citizenship for children of long-term visa holders who grow up in the United States. Multiple issues in our broken immigration system have caused these children to age out of their dependent statuses and self-deport, while many are on the verge of aging out. This means children who have grown up here will potentially be separated from their families when they lose legal dependent status after they turn 21 years old. I am one of these children. I am a Documented Dreamer.

I was born in India, and my parents brought me to the United States when I was four months old in August 2000. My mother arrived on a student visa, while my father and I were on dependent visas. We lived in Cincinnati, Ohio for about a year. After that, my family moved to Iowa City, Iowa in 2001, where both my parents completed their education on student visas. My mother has completed master's degrees in German, Educational Psychology, and Business Administration. My father completed his bachelor's degree and his master's degree in Computer Science at the University of Iowa. Both my parents started to work for the University of Iowa after completing their education. This was when my status changed to an H4 dependent visa in 2008. My mother works at College of Nursing, providing support for nursing education, and my father works at College of Medicine, giving critical information technology support for healthcare systems. My parents' employer filed for their green cards in 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> David Bier, "House Bill Provides Path to Citizenship for Most Legal Dreamers", 2021, available at <https://www.cato.org/blog/house-bill-provides-path-citizenship-most-legal-dreamers>

<sup>2</sup> USCIS, "Chapter 2 - Definition of Child and Residence for Citizenship and Naturalization", current as of 2021, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-h-chapter-2>

Having lived in this country for most of my life, I feel American in every way. I took my first steps as an infant in Cincinnati, Ohio, I learned how to speak and read in Iowa City. I learned how to ride a bike about a mile from my current home. I have attended kindergarten through high school in the Iowa City Community School District, and now I am in my third year of college at University of Iowa. My roots are here in Iowa. I have been brought up as a Midwestern American. This small, lively town and its residents have made me into a community-oriented individual. While volunteering for many organizations, including the Iowa City Public Library, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, and the City of Iowa City, getting involved in various student organizations from elementary school up to college, and making lifelong connections, I have realized that the United States is the only country I have ever known. While I am a citizen of India on paper, it is a country that I do not know. I am foreign when I visit because I feel like an Iowan and American at heart.

I have also had the opportunity to represent my high school at many national and state-level competitions, such as TEAMS (Tests of Engineering Aptitude, Mathematics and Science), JETS (Junior Engineering Technical Society), FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition, and Science Olympiad. Individually, as well as in teams, I have also won awards in many of them. In addition to this, I held dual positions of the Online Managing Editor and the Photo Editor for West Side Story – my high school newspaper. I was able to gain leadership experience by being a part of my high school's student senate for 3 years, and during my senior year of high school, I was selected to be the member of West High Principal's Advisory Committee.

During my time in the Iowa City Community School District, at every step of the way, I formed relationships with teachers and students that have had a life-long impact on me. Mrs. Riepe in elementary school guided me to lead. Mr. Norton in middle school gave me the confidence in my math skills that would one day allow me to choose engineering as my major. And Mr. Gross in high school encouraged me to speak up on unjust issues.

Throughout our family's journey of almost 21 years here, we have received love and help from many wonderful people of this country, and we are very much grateful for it. At the same time, our hearts break when we think of my future immigration status, and that of many other

Documented Dreamers. Due to the uncertainty of my situation, I have been in constant fear and worry for the past 5 or so years. I applied to colleges as an international student, despite not living in the country of my citizenship, like many Documented Dreamers. In addition to being an international student on the campus that I, very literally, grew up on, I have not been able to apply for any internships, which is an integral part of the holistic student experience.

I am now a junior at the University of Iowa majoring in biomedical engineering and minoring in business administration. As someone who is studying in the STEM field and would like to design and create medical devices and equipment, internships are one of the few ways through which students can acquire work experience. This has put me behind professionally, compared to my peers. As a result of the barriers I have faced, not only professionally, but also as a community member, and the daily worry of my situation, I have been diagnosed with clinical depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder. I have been seeing a therapist for more than a year because I reached a point where I could not cope alone, and I needed help.

In July 2020, I applied for a change of status to F1 student, and my application for a change of status to B2 bridge was submitted in early April 2021. However, both applications for change of statuses are pending. I also turned 21 less than two weeks ago, so I can no longer have dependent status. I essentially aged out of the system. The processing delays for these applications have increased my anxiety. Additionally, it is not a guarantee to be approved for a F1 student visa. Children who were raised in the United States on long-term visas like me are often denied a student visa because they are unable to show ties to their country of birth.<sup>3</sup> I could potentially be denied only because I have no ties to India on my own, and have spent most of my life here.

If my applications are denied, I will be immediately out of status, and will need to self-deport. This will hurt me not just mentally, but also professionally, because I will have to stop my education towards obtaining a degree in biomedical engineering here, when I have completed 3/4th of the curriculum. I will have to start over, and honestly, I do not know if I will be able to

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<sup>3</sup> Boston University, “Proving Nonimmigrant Intent”, current as of 2021, available at <https://www.bu.edu/isso/travel-visas/apply-for-a-visa/initial-visa-application/intent/>

do that. In addition to this, my family will be torn apart and all our lives will be in complete distress. I am the only child of my parents. Everything that my parents and I have worked for up until now will be lost. Our American dream that we hoped to pursue will vanish. My story might sound unique, however, there are hundreds of thousands of documented children who will or have gone through what I am experiencing. We are not just a statistic; the consequences are real for us.

Aging out is not the only issue we face. If my applications are approved, I'll be able to complete my education here, and maybe receive an H1-B work visa later. But again, the chances of acquiring an H1-B visa are low, because out of 275,000 applicants, only 85,000 are selected.<sup>4</sup> And even after going through the entire process for the employment-based green card, I'll be at the back of the line for people born in India.

Even after spending nearly my entire life here, I am still encountering the same hurdles as newly arrived international students. In fact, I am not even allowed to enroll in any classes from the end of this current academic semester until my application for change of status is approved. This means that I cannot take summer courses that are necessary for me to complete and graduate in a timely manner.

Despite following laws meticulously and maintaining stacks of legal documentation at all times, all odds appear to be against people like me. This story is not just mine. More than 200,000 children and families share my story. I joined Improve The Dream to help advocate and raise awareness for this issue along with others who are in a similar situation. We are grateful for our voice being recognized with our inclusion in the recently passed Dream and Promise Act.

Chairwoman Lofgren, we are extremely thankful to you for this positive change and hope that going forward, all solutions for Dreamers will include Documented Dreamers like us.

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<sup>4</sup> USCIS, "FY 2021 H-1B Cap Petitions May Be Filed as of April 1", 2020, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/fy-2021-h-1b-cap-petitions-may-be-filed-as-of-april-1>

However, I hope that this committee can go a step further and permanently end aging-out by creating mechanisms to prevent it from happening. I also hope the underlying root causes of aging out are addressed. More than 200,000 families in the United States, including mine, have followed the laws. We have maintained legal status, and speaking for my family, we have been here for almost a generation. This issue only highlights our plight. We have gotten in line. But our efforts have yet to see any success.

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member McClintock, and the members of this subcommittee: Thank you for your time today and thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story with you. I only ask that you consider the stories of families and Documented Dreamers and help us achieve a permanent solution. We are firmly rooted here in this community and in this country, but just not on paper. I request that you consider the children and the families who have had hopes in pursuing the American dream, the families that are being torn apart, despite maintaining a documented status. Our roots are American. This land of the free, this beautiful and generous nation is our home. I hope that you can Improve the Dream for the thousands of children and families who only want a chance at the American Dream.

Thank you again and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.