

Chairman Gallagher and Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi:

Thank you. I am happy to be here today to discuss these important issues, and I appreciate your time.

I was born in 2000 in the city of Benxi in Manchuria—the Chinese Northeast. I came to the US in 2018 to work on my undergraduate degree, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in 2021. I then began my studies at Georgetown Law, and I am set to graduate with a JD degree in May 2024.

I have long held political opinions against the CCP's authoritarianism and its many past atrocities. However, fear of retaliation had kept me from speaking out publicly against their regime, even after I came to the US. This is the shared experience of many Chinese citizens outside of China: No matter where in the world you are, even in the most mature democracies with centuries-old traditions of civil liberties, you are never free as long as anyone or anything you care about is under the control of the CCP.

My attitude changed after the CCP began the “zero-Covid” policy. What was initially commonplace pandemic responses gradually morphed into a dysfunctional high-control political movement by the CCP. In November 2022, a fire broke out in a Uyghur neighborhood in Urumqi, resulting in the tragic deaths of more than 40 people. This event happened not because the fire was extraordinarily powerful but because the complex was under lockdown. The gate was locked, preventing the fire truck from reaching the building.

Pro-democracy Chinese citizens outside of China, along with their allies, began to mobilize and organize demonstrations against the CCP's policies. In DC, the conversation revolved around commemorating the victims and finding solutions to China's authoritarianism. I also got involved by handing out flyers, making posters, and giving speeches. Soon after, transnational repression came.

I would divide transnational repression into two categories: formal and informal. Formal repression is carried out under the orders of the Chinese state by government workers, while informal repression is carried out organically by CCP supporters emboldened by the CCP.

Harassment from CCP supporters began as soon as I made political statements publicly. On Georgetown's main campus, a student who supported the CCP saw me handing out flyers and rebuked me, attempting to report me to the Chinese police.

Then formal repression came. From June to November, my family members in China were harassed and threatened four times by the Chinese government. This started because they suspected me of being a member of a pro-democracy Chinese student group in DC. It all began with my sister receiving a call from the local police station in late June, asking for the current addresses of my family members. Days later, in early July, national securities officers came knocking on my parents' door and hauled my father away in front of my terrified mother for interrogation. They asked my father extensively about my political convictions and eventually let him go on the condition that he makes me “love the country and love the Party” with a threat of “or else.”

I decided to tell this story to the media, and the repercussions came again. After a story exposing my situation was published by Radio Free Asia in September and another by VOA two weeks ago, my father was harassed twice more. Both times, local officials called to let my father meet them at their office. Once, an official pulled out a printed copy of my text messages with my mother and my sister on WeChat to show my father that I harbored the thought of supporting democracy. Both times, they made my father make me stop speaking about the CCP's horrific actions.

The CCP carries this out systematically: about a dozen Chinese students in the DC area had their families harassed this year. From oral accounts, we can see how the CCP has a sophisticated system to repress people outside of China: There are social media teams to spot potential troublemakers, liaison teams that send orders to local police departments to get the addresses of these people's families, and teams that get sent out to do the interrogations and deliver the threats.

Because of repressions like these, Chinese citizens face insurmountable barriers when they try to speak out against the CCP. These repressions, when they reach America, limit the civil liberties of noncitizens in the country. They are also not compliant with international law with respect to the sovereignty of other nations. Moreover, many dissidents like me are on visas like the student visa, and we are faced with a lot of fear in the event that we will have to return to China, where custodial and judicial abuses are more than commonplace. I hope for a day when people like me can think in peace, deliberate in peace, and practice their faith in peace. I hope that my testimony will contribute to the realization of such hopes.

Thank you. I am happy to answer your questions.

Jinrui Zhang