

Statement of Ismail Alghazali

Before the
Committee on Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on “Oversight of the Trump Administration’s Muslim Ban”
September 24, 2019

My name is Ismail Alghazali and I live in New York City, the greatest city in the world.

I work at a bodega – a small neighborhood market – in Brooklyn. This work doesn't make me rich, but I love it because I get to meet so many people – people of all races and religions. When anyone comes to the store, I want to take care of them. And I know all my regular customers by name.

Today, I'm here to tell you the story of my family: my wonderful wife, Hend and our two beautiful children. Khaled, my son who is a year and a half old, and my newborn baby, Rahf, my daughter, who is 5 months old. I've never even met my daughter. I have never held her in my arms. I've only seen her through photos and videos.

I do not have words to describe my love for my wife and my kids. It hurts me so much that it's now been more than a year since I've seen my family. Hend, Khaled, Rahf and I – we're separated from each other by thousands of miles because of President Trump's Muslim Ban.

I knew I wanted to marry Hend right away after I met her. We fell in love and got married in Yemen before our families and friends in 2013.

Hend has the best heart. She wants to take care of people. Her dream is to become a nurse. She can't do this in Yemen, but can pursue her dreams in America.

But I had to leave Hend behind and go back to America. It was hard. We were just married. And the civil war made life in Yemen dangerous. But I needed to secure our future in America.

In my heart, I felt that we would be together in America soon. I am a U.S. citizen and we were married. What could go wrong?

After 2 long years, the date for our immigration interview – January 3rd, 2018 – had finally arrived. I returned to Yemen to be with Hend. My friends and coworkers loaned me the money I needed for the trip. Together we travelled to Djibouti for the interview – because of the war, the US closed its embassy in Yemen. When we arrived, Hend was eight months pregnant with our son. Her pregnancy had been difficult. Doctors discovered she had a heart condition.

We knew that the Muslim Ban stopped Yemenis from entering the U.S., but we also knew that it allowed waivers for close family members of U.S. citizens and for humanitarian purposes. Hend should have been eligible for a waiver – I'm a U.S. citizen, she's my wife and she needs medical care for a serious health condition.

But, the interview did not go as expected. Our meeting did not even last five minutes. They returned Hend's passport and said that her visa had been denied because of the Muslim Ban and that even though Hend was my wife, we were not eligible for a waiver.

We were stuck in Djibouti. I was not able to work there, and the money I had borrowed from friends to make the trip was running out. I was not sure what to do next.

Hend went into labor late one night. For most couples, this is a happy occasion. For us, it was the most frightening experience in my life.

It took me 30 minutes to find a cab while my wife was in pain. Hend's contractions were coming faster and faster. We were 5 minutes away from the hospital but there was no time left.

Hend gave birth to our son, Khaled, in the back of that cab. I'll never forget that night and how hopeless I felt. I hated that I had to go back to New York again without them but I had no choice but to provide for my family. And in April of this year, my wife gave birth to our daughter Rahf in Yemen and it broke my heart that I wasn't there for her.

Now, I have been asked to come back and reinterview for the waiver. I still have hope that we will be together again as a family here.

I will show my family New York City. Hend will become a nurse. My son and daughter will go to school and pursue their own dreams.

I pray that you will find it in your hearts to allow families like mine to be together. Please end this ban.

Thank you