

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF PABLO DILBERT, DEPORTED VETERAN

**HEARING ON THE IMPACT OF CURRENT IMMIGRATION POLICIES ON SERVICE
MEMBERS AND VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES**

SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

OCTOBER 29, 2019

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairwoman, Subcommittee
on Immigration and Citizenship
House Judiciary Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am writing to provide my experience as a deported veteran, in hopes that it will help you better understand my situation and the situation of other veterans like me.

I entered the United States with my parents in 1970 when I was only a year old. In 1972, I became a legal permanent resident. Having lived in Michigan for most of my life, I moved to Grand Rapids in 1990 after earning my G.E.D. In 1997, I decided to serve my country and join the United States Marine Corps. I was awarded the Rifle Sharpshooter Badge, the Meritorious Mast, and a letter of appreciation before being honorably discharged.

However, the Marine Corps was also a source of great trauma for me. During my service, I was raped and while I reported the incident at the time, the U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service did not investigate further. Around the same time, my mom was diagnosed with cancer. The emotional trauma of the rape and my mom's cancer diagnosis drove me into a period of drug addiction and homelessness.

During that stage of my life, I was convicted of two non-violent crimes — one for cashing a fraudulent check amounting to less than \$600 and another for accepting \$20 from two undercover police officers seeking to purchase cocaine. Although I did not deliver the police officers any cocaine, I was found in possession of a pipe and arrested. I am not proud of this period and I sought to rebuild my life. I was rehabilitated at the Pine Rest Jellema House rehabilitation and mental health center in Grand Rapids. After rehabilitation, I obtained a job repairing computers at an Ann Arbor veterans facility. I earned an honest living as I worked to help fellow veterans. I bought a house and made a life for myself.

In 2014, I applied for naturalization in hopes of completing my American journey by finally becoming a full citizen of the only country I have ever known as home. Instead, ICE used the

information in my application to detain and ultimately remove me from the United States to Honduras based on my criminal record.

In Honduras, I have experienced significant challenges. I care for my partner and my stepchildren, but I worry that the healthcare that we have access to in Honduras is not adequate. For example, my stepson consumed tainted meat at a childcare facility and now, after five surgeries, can no longer walk or speak and must be tube fed. I suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes, and sleep apnea, which I used to receive care for through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

After approximately 40 years of living in the United States, it is difficult to adjust to living in an unfamiliar place. The non-violent mistakes that I made nearly a decade before I applied for naturalization, during a period of homelessness and addiction, which I deeply regret, should not result in my exile. I do not believe that this is what the State of Michigan intended when I was convicted and I do not believe that the United States should abandon its veterans to such a fate. I hope that Congress will understand my hardships and those of my fellow deported veterans and help us to return home. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Pablo Antonio Dilbert

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pablo Antonio Dilbert", written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.