

Testimony of Dimple Navratil
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Thank you Chairwoman Lofgren and Ranking Member Buck, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Dimple Navratil. I appreciate the opportunity to tell my mostly happy immigration story. I am originally from India, but I am now a proud citizen of the United States. I have made my home in Racine Wisconsin, a beautiful city on the shores of Lake Michigan.

I have been married to Denis Navratil for 28 years and together we have a grown son named Zane. Please allow a mother to brag. Zane is a 3 time state champion in tennis. He was an academic All American in college. He is an accountant and also the 5th ranked Pickleball player in the world. He is also a humble and kind young man.

We own a retail store on Main Street in Racine called Dimple's. Our business has been in downtown Racine for 21 years, making us the oldest downtown merchant. We specialize in sterling silver jewelry and unique gifts from around the world. Also, we have raised roughly \$1 million over the years for hospitals via jewelry fundraisers.

On a personal note, I feel blessed for the opportunities available to a minority woman from a 3rd world country. 27 years ago, I started a small business, selling jewelry from a little folding table at a church festival to today, owning a large retail store in Racine. I also feel fully accepted by the community and the many organizations that I now serve as a board member, including the Racine Zoo, the Downtown Racine Corporation and the Ascension Hospital Foundation.

Our business has grown slowly and steadily over the years and we expected the same this year. Then COVID hit and our business was forced to close. Sadly, we had to let go of some excellent employees, a first for us. And then our hospital partners began cancelling our fundraisers, which account for approximately half of our sales. Suddenly, the survival of our business was at stake.

Our local mayor, Corey Mason, then announced that the city would award grants to small businesses negatively impacted by COVID. We applied for the relief. Though we clearly met the criteria, and the city strongly indicated a desire to assist women and minority owned businesses, we were denied both of the two rounds of grants that were funded through HUD and our local taxes.

I didn't understand why we were denied the grants. I thought that many would consider our award winning business an anchor in downtown, worthy of efforts to save. We pay our taxes on time, we are active in the community, and we are located in heart of our business district. Something didn't seem right.

After some persistence, I received a call from Mayor Mason. After more questioning, he told me the real reason why we were denied the grant. It was because my husband had attended the Open

Wisconsin rally in Madison that challenged Governor Evers Stay at Home Order. Mayor Mason admitted as much in a public statement, adding that Denis, and I quote, “willingly jeopardized public health,” “flagrantly violated safety measures,” put “city residents at unnecessary risk” and engaged in “reckless behavior” at the rally.

Here is the truth. Denis did attend the rally. Because he was concerned about the virus, he wore a mask, he stayed at the edge of the crowd, and was careful to maintain a safe distance from others. All of this has been proven. It was there that Denis was approached by a reporter. He had two simple points. First, if a liquor store or Walmart can safely serve their customers, why can't we? Second, you can be concerned about the damage done by the virus AND care about the people suffering economically.

It is also important to stress the nature of this protest. Nobody was insulting or throwing objects at the police. No buildings were set on fire. No businesses were looted or destroyed. There were no arrests. It was an ENTIRELY peaceful protest.

Apparently our mayor believes he is not constrained by our constitution that I swore allegiance to and that he swore to uphold.

We have decided to fight this injustice. As such, I am grateful to live in the United States, with a constitution designed to protect the rights of citizens from abusive officials. I am thankful to have the opportunity to pursue a just conclusion through an impartial judicial system. I look forward to a resolution that I trust will uphold the cherished rights of all Americans.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.