

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Dreams Can Come True

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Throughout my life, I was blessed by parents who encouraged us to dream big. They continually reminded us that we could be who ever we dreamed of being. They instilled a sense of hope, honesty and respect for others. In other words, be all you can be, but do not step on others to get there.

As I look back, their advice and encouragement was packed with meaning because my parents recognized that social systems would tear us down. They worked extra hard to inspire a sense of history and dignity in us. My parents modeled the belief that we could make a difference in our own destiny and so we did. We believed that dreams can come true.

I also believe that parents or parent figures all over the world want the same for their children. They want them to be safe. They want them to have shelter and food. They want them to be happy. They want them to know that they are loved. They want them to hope and dream. Parents want their children's dreams to come true.

Today, in the United States, the dreams of thousands of young people are blocked because they are immigrants and do not have the "right" documents. Many of these children have lived in this country most of their lives and know very little about their homeland. Millions of Americans could say the same thing; however, many did not face the current resistance that is sadly so much a part of today's anti-immigrant sentiment in our culture.

There are many faces to this story, but I'll share just two (names are changed to protect their privacy.)

I met Maritza over fifteen years ago. I was part of a group of Latinos and Latinas in our community whose mission was to support the leadership development. People with gifts just needed the chance to access training or gain experience. In her 11th grade year, like other students, she began searching for colleges and money, Maritza wanted to be medical doctor; she knew that she was facing years of preparation. What she didn't realize is that she did not qualify for in-state tuition in a public university, even though she was an honor student. Maritza had come to the U.S. as a small child and her parents could not afford the legal fees to get documents for their whole family. Her dream was at risk of not coming true, but she never gave up.

Felipe is a "straight A" student. He graduated at the top of his class in May; Valedictorian of his senior class. He came to the United States with his Mom, his sister, and brother when he was ten years old. They came because their small agricultural community had been taken over by corporate farmers from the United States, lands were sold and people were put out of work. Felipe wants to be a biochemist. He wants to do medical research to find cures for diseases. He wants to work on the complexities of how illnesses affect people from different races and cultures. He wants to go to college but cannot afford the tuition. His dream is the same as Maritza's was some fifteen years ago.

Today, we can help make dreams come true for thousands of young people across this land. At a time when our political leaders are deeply divided on so many issues, both houses of Congress have joined to move the DREAM Act forward. The DREAM Act will provide the avenue for young people to apply for legal status in the United States. Both Democrat and Republican leaders agree that the DREAM Act is good policy for the nation, for families, and for individuals. The Capitol Switchboard number is (202) 224-3121. Please contact your Senator and Representative and let them know that you want to be part of making DREAMS come true.

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