

House Judiciary Committee testimony – Mayor Julián Castro

Thank you Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Conyers, Members of the Committee . . .

I come to you today as many things — an American, an optimist, the grandson of an immigrant orphan from Mexico who found opportunity in this great country, and as Mayor of the nation's seventh-largest city, a community that looks like the Texas and America of tomorrow.

Immigration is more than a political issue. It's who we are. From Plymouth Rock to Ellis Island and Galveston, Texas, to the sandy shores of Florida and the rocky coasts of California, immigrants have made ours the greatest country in the world.

Today, however, our immigration system is badly broken. But there is hope. This hearing and more importantly, the bipartisan legislation that I believe can be enacted because of it, shows that we are on the cusp of real progress.

The President and a growing number of bipartisan lawmakers have laid the framework for what Americans support: comprehensive, common-sense reform.

We must do at least three things: further strengthen border security; streamline the legal immigration process so that law-abiding companies can get the workers they need in this 21st century global economy; and create a path to citizenship to bring the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country out of the shadows and into the full light of the American Dream.

In Texas, we know first-hand that this Administration has put more boots on the ground along the border than at any time in our history, which has led to unprecedented success in removing dangerous individuals with criminal records. But Democrats and Republicans can agree that the work to ensure America's safety and security is ongoing, and should be part of the legislative agenda going forward.

The reforms that you have on the table are also pro-family and pro-business. Outdated visa allocations that separate husbands and wives, mothers and children, and brothers and sisters for years and sometimes decades make no sense.

It also makes no sense that, while some employers choose to flout the rule of law and exploit employees, other companies who want to play by the rules are handcuffed by rigid employment ceilings and burdensome regulations.

Every year, as competition increases across the globe, American companies throw up their hands and watch engineers, nurses and entrepreneurs, who were trained in American universities, leave in frustration only to invent new products, heal the sick and bring new innovations to other countries.

What Americans deserve is a system that works. A system that is efficient. That is accountable. That, in our nation's best interest, puts the undocumented immigrants already here on a road to earned citizenship.

Those immigrants take on many faces from Virginia to North Carolina to Utah. In San Antonio, those faces include students like Benita Veliz.

Benita, like many so-called DREAMers, was brought to this country as a child from Mexico. She learned English, played by the rules and achieved astounding academic success — even becoming valedictorian of my alma mater, Thomas Jefferson High School.

A National Merit Scholar, Benita earned a bachelor's degree by the time she was 20.

By any measure, Benita is an American success story. But under current immigration law, she is in limbo. America is her home in every sense of the word, except under this broken immigration system.

Since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, America has distinguished itself as the land of opportunity, the place where the human spirit is free to reach its full potential.

In this 21st century global economy, we need Benita and immigrants like her to be competitive.

As each generation of Americans has passed on to the next, this great nation has drawn tremendous strength from immigrants, whether they came from Germany, Italy, India or Mexico.

But we all know that a hearing is not enough. Let's rise above the political fray. Let's once again show that no challenge is too big for America.

Ladies and Gentlemen, America is watching. Let's get this done.

Thank you.