

Hello,

My name is Georgina Hernandez

Thank you all for taking the time to listen, I am here as an opponent of bill #HB2192. I would like to begin by thanking the State and Federal Affairs Committee for allowing me to come forth and share my testimony. I will be honest and say that I have never shared my testimony in public with anyone that is not family, friend, or teacher. My father migrated here from Mexico City in 1997 to work at my aunt's restaurant in Liberal, Kansas. For those present that are not familiar with the current demographics of Liberal, KS: 58.7% (Almost 60%, over half) are Hispanic, 33.3% White, and all others races below 3.3%. The majority of Hispanics are mainly there because of the meat packing, pig farming, or the oil field industries.

At the time the restaurant was a novelty, since there were not many Hispanic restaurants in the area yet. My father had originally planned for a six month period and then return home. After the six month period concluded, he realized that he was making really good money. More money than he was making back home and since things were getting harder there, him and my mother decided that she should migrate here as well and spend another six months and return with some money saved up; so, she did. Months before her arrival into the U.S. she began preparing by studying an encyclopedia every night in order to teach herself English. When she arrived she began applying what she had learned back home on the job. Soon, she was making more tips than anyone there. Unfortunately, this did not sit well with my aunt. She kicked my mother and my father out of her house and did not allow them to work for them anymore. She said it was no longer convenient for her.

Although it was snowing, it did not matter to my aunt that they had no relatives, no food, no car and no place to go. Fortunately my mother and father had been saving up, walked a couple miles and found a trailer for sale. They purchased it on the spot paid cash for it and stayed there. My mother describes it as the "coldest day in her life". Since they had never activated bills and did not have a car or much money left, they had no choice, but to use newspapers as blankets for the night. They simply prayed and fell asleep. The day after; they got some necessities at the Salvation Army and began hunting for jobs and luckily, they were both able to find two jobs each.

Meanwhile things back home were getting worse. My grandparents were having difficulty taking care of us and providing for our needs, and we kids were having trouble dealing with my parents being so far away from us. We would cry on the phone and beg them to either come back, or bring us with them. Eventually, they brought us here, we arrived in 1999. I was 10 years old at the time, and knew zero English. It was very difficult to adjust and assimilate into this country. I would get very frustrated because I could not communicate with my classmates or teachers. I was very isolated. My frustration only fueled me however; every day, I would go home and read about 10 of my three-word picture books. Books designed for children 3-5 old. It only took me a year to fully read, write and speak English. My teacher was so impressed that she would use me as an example to follow in front of my other classmates. I began to receive awards and get really into the books. I was a straight A student throughout my entire academic career. I graduated with honors from middle school, high school,

community college and more recently, from Fort Hays State University where I obtained my Bachelor's in Science; emphasis in pre-law and international relations. Although my dream was to go on to law school, I had to be realistic and know that I did not have enough money to afford it. Instead I enrolled at Wichita State University. I am now a graduate student at the Hugo Wall School of Public and Urban Affairs seeking my master's in public administration.

The first step to allow me to be where I am today was definitely Butler Community College. I was blessed to receive an academic and soccer scholarship there. These enabled me to go on to higher education like I dreamed of. I remember when I was a senior in High School I received the best and the worst news at the same time. On one hand I was going to be awarded a soccer scholarship and on the other I discovered that I could not receive financial aid, get a job or a driver's license, had no car, and not have enough money for the dorms (which I was required to stay at for the first year). The only benefit I would receive is pay in-state tuition fees, because I graduated from a Kansas high school and the soccer scholarship, which would cover my books, the rest would be up to my parents whom would have to pay out of pocket.

When I had to sit down and make a decision with my parents they told me something that I always have in the back of my head. It has stuck with me for 5 and half years since I left liberal to go off to College: "It does not matter what we have to do or sell for you to continue your education, as long as you keep going and reach your full potential in life. There is one thing we will not allow you to do: to live a mediocre life and settle for a meat packing job. Most of the people in this town only aspire to work at the meat plant, and have a nice truck. We do not care if we have to ride bikes, as long as you continue to prove to us that you are deserve it, we will find a way. Follow your dreams and always remember that if there is a will, then there is a way."

Before actually signing into Butler, I opened up to my coach and explained the situation. He promised my parents that he would find ways to help. Whether he needed to drive me himself to practices or have one of my teammates take me. He assured them that they had nothing to worry about. It was at Butler where I was able to get a more rounded understanding of general studies and a better idea of what I wanted to do in the future. I discovered that I really enjoyed history, politics and law. More importantly, I was also able to realize the sacrifice my parents were making and admired them even more for their hard work and support.

After Butler, I was lost and worried because I thought that was it. I did not know what was next and almost felt as though it was pointless to continue if my degrees would be useless. After weighing my options and realizing that I had to find ways to continue, so I decided to go to FHSU. I moved in the summer, and worked as a house keeper during the night and a hotel clerk during the day every day. Saved enough to pay for my books, bills and with the help of my parents for school tuition (again, as an in-state student)

My parents have lived here for almost sixteen years, without seeing their family and just working, paying taxes and supporting my educational expenses out of pocket. I cannot imagine where I would be if they did not make the sacrifices they have mad thus far, but it is important to acknowledge

that my parents would not have been able to pay for any of my education if I paid out-of-state tuition rates. I feel like I deserve to pay in-state tuition rates. Since my parents came here they have paid sales, use, state and local taxes. I have attended Kansas schools my whole life. There are thousands of kids like myself whom aspire to go to college, even at these in-state tuition rates they are still find it hard to attend. It still too difficult, they are not taking any financial aid from other Kansas students. They are not asking for much; just the chance to pay in-state tuition fees out their own pocket, like my parents and I have done. I will also not be able to finish my master's degree at Wichita state if this bill passes, my dreams would die with its passing.

I truly believe that the problem is that many people are ill informed and have many misconceptions about illegal immigration. It is easy to say things like "they need to go back and cross the border the right way" but what many also don't realize is that countries and cities like mine are so corrupt. For example in father's and mother's case they got their passport, had a perfect profile. Good credit score, no felonies or offenses, etc. Paid for their immigration interview to determine whether they were granted a visa or not, and it all comes down to a yes or no. If a yes, good for you, if a no, too bad, no refunds are given. Also, it all comes down to how many types of visas the government agrees to grant. It is all complex, but we can all agree that our entire immigration system needs fixed. But this bill will only make the current immigration climate worse. Illegal or legal, black or white, short or tall, we are all human beings, and students like myself already have enough worries and frustrations, that it is just unnecessary and inhumane to make it even harder.

If we are already on the ground struggling to get up, the passing of this bill would be like kicking us, instead of helping us up. I stand here before you and humbly ask that you do not pass this bill. I ask that you allow students like me the opportunity to attend our Kansas colleges at instate tuition rates, and to not place further limitations than what we already have. It is hard to place yourself in someone else's shoes, but I stand before you and take mine off, and ask that you place yourselves in them when it is time to vote.

Does everyone remember a case here in Topeka called Brown vs. The Board of Education? Well, in this case a part I will never forget is when the psychiatrist asked the young African American girls that which doll was better and they chose the white, showing to the court that they were starting to believe that they were inferior. This is what would happen if this bill passes; place this idea in the minds of undocumented students following their dreams that they shouldn't. That they are not good enough, that it is too hard, that they can't do it. I am not a psychiatrist, but I have felt like this at times. It is my natural optimism and hard work that continues to fuel me and does not let me give up, but there are many already doing so. Thank you for your time, and I implore that you reach into your hearts and see why this bill would be atrocious for the lives and dreams of many.

