

Thank you, Senator Blumenthal for the honor of being your guest today and the opportunity to share my story.

My name is Fernando Hernandez Garcia, except it's not. That's the name I have to use to protect mine and my family's safety.

Over one year ago now, my life completely changed. One morning, my little sister woke up and told my parents that her head hurt. My parents took this very seriously because the year before, she had emergency surgery to remove a tumor. My parents and my five siblings got in the car and drove from South Texas to Houston so she could see a specialist at Texas Children's Hospital. On the way, government officials stopped them at a checkpoint and deported everyone. Even though my parents told them about my sister's condition. Even though my siblings are U.S. citizens.

I wasn't with my family at the time, but I am familiar with the route and process they took to get my sister to Houston to visit her doctors. We did that several times without issue previously before the Trump administration took office.

I was visiting relatives out of state when I received the call from my parents that they had been detained and would soon be deported.

I remember this day like it was yesterday, because it was the last day I remember feeling like a kid.

When I heard the news, I couldn't breathe. I didn't know what I was going to do. My mom worried about me returning to our home in South Texas alone, but I had to finish High School and I wanted to make sure I could do everything in my power to stay on top of the bills and keep the home my mom and dad had sacrificed so much for.

Over the past year, I have worked hard to make sure I was the first in my family to graduate from a US high school. My parents were not there to celebrate this honor with me. I began working multiple jobs to send money to my family, keep up on housing payments; and when possible: continue advocating for my family to return home. While my friends planned for college, joined the military, and started working toward their career goals, I spent all of my time working. I still do. Even being here to advocate for my family has impacted my ability to work. I can't think about the things my peers are doing because I honestly can't relate. When I have a small moment of free time, I call my parents so they know I'm alright and so my siblings can hear my voice.

When I call, my mom tells me about how my sister can't get the treatment she needs in the rural part of Mexico they are in because she isn't a Mexican citizen, how she's getting worse by the day, having a lot of the same medical issues she had when the brain tumor was diagnosed. She has a 'novel' medical condition that needs specialized care. My dad recently got a job that

requires him to travel a lot in Mexico. It pays better, but the road can be a dangerous place, she tells me.

I can hear the stress in my mom's voice and I just wish I could take the weight off of her shoulders.

The situation is a nightmare that I can't wake up from, that my family can't wake up from. My baby sister needs to see her doctors: but she needs to get care alongside her family. I need my family to come home. I'm 18 years old, I still need the support of my parents, I need to be around for my siblings. I've been dreaming of going to college, but that isn't something I can do without my support system- both financially or emotionally.

You can say all you want that these awful immigration policies don't impact U.S. citizens, but that's a lie: my family was ripped apart from me, and my future along with them. If my parents were still here, they would have pushed me to go to college, to dream big, and they would have helped me make it happen. Now, I don't even have time to think about that. My baby sister could die as a result of this mess.

Today I've been asked several times how you all can help me: bring my family home, save my sister's life, end this nightmare for me and for all the other families like mine, who just want to live an honest life and work hard for a better future.