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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0533

“Occupations and Professions - Licenses, Certificates, and Registration - Immigrants”

To: Chair C.T. Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee
From: Andrea Chavez Romero

I have been a resident of southern Prince George’s County for the past 16 years. I am currently an undergraduate student at Trinity Washington University, 20 years old, and I am also one of 13,000 immigrants in Maryland who are eligible for DACA, but because Former President Trump ended the status in 2017 and a federal judge in Texas recently ruled that DACA was adopted illegally, a number of applications have been backlogged and no new applications have been accepted since July 2021.^{1,2} Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is an immigration status that partially protects individuals who came to the U.S. as children.³ As a result, I cannot obtain a social security number and work authorization document to obtain licensure in Maryland. I am now currently in an immigration process called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, that once granted will allow me to apply for a green card. However, the current visa bulletin backlog means that the wait times for a green card for a Salvadoran resident are between two to three years before I can get legal status.

I have experienced various forms of adversity from a young age. When I was eleven years old I experienced my father’s first schizophrenic episode, where I was left in a wheelchair with a broken pelvis and seven screws. My father experienced schizophrenic relapses for the next four years until I turned fifteen years old. He chose to abandon me and my family and returned to El Salvador. During this time, I started working to help my single mother pay the bills and put food on the table. I had to learn to grow up quickly, and truly appreciate all the sacrifices my mother made for us. In return, I want to make an impact in my community and serve as a role model of resilience for others.

I aspire to enroll in dental school to become a dentist and then specialize in Maxillofacial and Oral surgery. However, upon graduating with my bachelor’s degree in Chemistry and Data Analytics I will not be able to apply to dental school in Maryland without a social security number. I will not be able to get licensure in Maryland. I will have to relocate out of state to

¹ Migration Policy Institute. (2021). “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools.”

² Rodriguez, S., Gerstein, J. (2021). “Federal judge finds DACA unlawful, blocks new applicants,” Politico.

³ Migration Policy Institute. (2021). “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools.”

get my education and go into private practice. This legislation will help students like myself who have to deal with perpetual legal barriers towards our future education and career aspirations and will serve as an incentive to keep talent in Maryland. This legislation will have a profound impact on the Maryland community if passed, and so I am asking the committee to give a favorable report on HB0533.

Overall, this legislation would give more undocumented students an incentive to finish their education, integrate into the professional sector, and make fuller contributions towards Maryland's community and economy. I respectfully urge the committee to give HB0533 a favorable report.