

Willians Sanchez HB0114/SB129
Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings
FAVORABLE

Good evening. My name is Willians Sanchez. I am from Mexico. I came to the United States when I was 18 years old to live with my mother. I have been living in Annapolis and working in construction and as an electrician for 14 years. Now, I have my family. My little daughter, Stefanie, was born here. My daughter is my motivation and the person that keeps me going.

I went through a very difficult time when I was separated from my daughter (when she was only a few months old) when I was detained by immigration. Thanks to my mom (who struggled a lot to raise the money) I was able to get a lawyer who helped me secure a protected status here and be in my daughter's life. Without a lawyer, I don't know what I would have done.

My story started on May 9, 2010. I went to my job at McDonald's and in a few hours the police arrived. They asked me my name. I said my name was Willians - and then they immediately arrested me and took me outside. They took me to an unknown house where they held me until immigration came. At first, I felt confident and safe because I knew that I had not committed a crime. I hadn't even received a traffic ticket. But when I saw immigration, I was so afraid that they were going to deport me and separate me from my family.

When immigration stopped me, I suffered a lot. It was the separation of my family - especially my baby daughter. It was being treated like a criminal. It was the worry of losing my job and not having the money to support my daughter and having the money to pay for a lawyer and immigration procedures.

While I was in detention, immigration agents frequently visited me, urging me to sign my deportation, telling me that if I signed my voluntary deportation, I would not have to suffer anymore. But I wanted to fight my case to be with my daughter.

I spent a little over a month in detention when my mom helped me to get a lawyer with borrowed money. The cost in total was almost \$11,000. When I managed to speak to my

lawyer, I realized that the Annapolis police were accusing me of being a part of a gang without any evidence. Thanks to the lawyer, I got out of detention and was able to get protected status so that I could stay here with my wife and daughter.

No families should have to go through this situation. Immigrants in detention should have the right to have a free public immigration lawyer. Your life shouldn't depend on how much money you have. There are many injustices and traps in the system and without a lawyer, vulnerable and poor people do not have the opportunity to defend themselves.

Please, legislators, support the proposal of Access to Counsel so that immigrants in Maryland have the right to defense in freedom and do not suffer the economic impact - in addition to the sadness of having a loved one in a cruel process. Thanks a lot.