

Written Statement of Erika Orrantia,

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship  
Hearing "'Why Don't They Just Get in Line?' Barriers to Legal Immigration"

April 28, 2021

Thank you, Subcommittee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, (D-CA), Ranking Member Tom McClintock (R-CA), and members of the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for this opportunity to submit this written statement in support of the American Families United Act, which would address barriers to legal immigration for spouses and children of U.S. citizens. I would especially like to thank my Congresswoman, Representative Veronica Escobar, for introducing this bill.

My name is Erika Orrantia. I am a U.S. citizen currently living in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. I travel into El Paso, Texas daily to work as an educator. When I met my husband, Luis, I was finishing up my student teaching at Northern Arizona University. I fell in love with my husband and we have been married for 14 years. Luis was the ultimate gentleman. He treated me like I had never been treated before and our sweet friendship blossomed into a love that I thought was only possible in fairy tales. I knew my husband was undocumented, but why would I break things off with my soul mate merely due to him not having certain 'papers'? As an American-born citizen, with deeply planted roots dating back to the Revolutionary War, surely there would be a way to correct his wrongs—right? I found out the cruelest and most sobering truth- that this was not the case.

You see, more than twenty years ago my husband made a terrible mistake. He found out his U.S. citizen fiancé was pregnant and, out of desperation, told Border Patrol authorities that he was "American". His relationship with his fiancé eventually ended. After we were married, we began his immigration process and, as a part of the process, he went to his interview to obtain his residency status. The caseworker asked him how he came across the border. He told the truth. He was later notified by mail that, because of how he entered the US, he now had a permanent lifetime ban without any chance of a waiver and was ordered to leave the United States. He knew that lying was wrong but had no idea the magnitude of his actions. We had established an American lifestyle and now had two U.S. citizen children.

When I learned about my husband's inadmissibility, my world came crashing down and my husband was soon deported. How was I supposed to tell my 2 year old and 3 year old children that daddy wasn't coming home? We eventually came to Ciudad Juarez because that is where my husband had his family and was able to gain employment.

We have been living here now for ten years. Life is very hard living in a third-world country with so much corruption. I do not ever venture out by myself—as a tall, Anglo woman who speaks only English, I have trouble blending in. Learning Spanish has proved to be especially difficult for me and without much success.

It is a very hard pill to swallow that my children and I may never be able to live in the country of our birth right as a complete family. Before my husband's deportation, we knew no other country. My ancestors fought for my freedoms in the Revolutionary War and my great grandfather was a 6' 5" man who wasted away to 120 pounds as a prisoner of the Civil War. Despite my deep-seated roots in the United States, I have no way to keep my family intact and live in the country that I feel so connected to. My husband can never attend important events pertaining to our children that are held in the United States, nor will he be there when they graduate. If I ever need help while in El Paso---I am on my own, and that is a helpless feeling.

As U.S. citizens, my children and I are suffering due to my family living in exile. We know we don't 'belong' in Mexico. As Americans, we feel that we should get as much relief as anyone else being considered for immigration reform. Therefore, I would like to personally say thank you to Congresswoman Veronica Escobar for reintroducing the American Families United Act. The American Families United Act will help American families that have been denied the right to keep their families together. Every immigration case is unique and should not be lumped together in a "one size fits all" sentence. Due process is desperately needed. We hope and pray for waiver equity so that our family can finally come home.

Sincerely,

Erika Orrantia