

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing on “Keeping Families Together: The President’s Executive Action On
Immigration And The Need To Pass Comprehensive Reform”
December 10, 2014**

Today the Senate Judiciary Committee again turns its attention to the need to fix our broken immigration system, a system that too often tears families apart. This hearing is in many ways a sequel to our hearing last year entitled “How Comprehensive Immigration Reform Should Address the Needs of Women and Families.” Senator Hirono, herself an immigrant from Japan, presided over that hearing last year and I am happy that she will lead today’s continuation of that discussion.

Our first hearing looked at this poignant issue at a time of great optimism. We had tremendous bipartisan momentum building as we worked to draft and debate a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would bring stability and peace to so many families living in fear of losing a mother, father, sister or brother to deportation.

We accomplished a great deal in that bipartisan effort. Both Democrats and Republicans praised the fair and thorough process we gave that bill here in the Judiciary Committee. We had 6 hearings featuring 42 witnesses. We debated bipartisan legislation a total of 37 hours over a 3-week period. We considered 212 amendments, and we adopted 136 of them – all but 3 on a bipartisan basis. The full Senate then considered our bill and approved it by an overwhelming bipartisan majority.

House Republican leadership, however, disregarded the extensive transparent process as well as the legislation’s bipartisan support and refused to take the bill up for consideration. They blocked similar efforts by their own members to address this growing crisis, ignoring the strain it imposes on our economy, our communities, and our families.

In the wake of the House’s refusal to engage on comprehensive immigration reform, and after years of delay and broken promises by opponents, the President acted. His executive action is a measured and legal response to what we all acknowledge is a broken system. But it is temporary. It is not a substitute for Congressional action and we must keep working to find a permanent answer.

It is against this backdrop that we hold today’s hearing to return to the heart of the immigration debate – the impact our broken immigration system has on our families.

I look forward to hearing from Astrid Silva. Hers is an American story. It is similar in many ways to that of our parents and grandparents. It is a story of a family looking to find a better life. A story of hard work and persistence. Astrid is a beneficiary of the President’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. And her parents will be eligible for the new Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) program because her younger brother is a U.S. citizen. For more than 20 years, Astrid’s family has been working hard and contributing to their local community. They are exactly the kind of family we want to have as our neighbors and coworkers. In just one example of her dedication and hard work, Astrid, arranged to take her

final examinations days early – on very short notice- so that she could join us here today. Astrid, we look forward to hearing from you.

I also look forward to hearing from Elizabeth Shuler, the Secretary Treasurer of the AFL-CIO, about why the President's actions are not just good for families, but good for American workers, and the U.S. economy overall. And I look forward to the debate among the legal scholars who will share their thoughts on the legal authority of the President's actions, especially Professor Schroeder who is no stranger to the Committee.

I applaud the President's action to keep families together. The American people are with him and his actions were an important step in fixing some of the greatest injustices in our immigration system. But alone they are not enough. Congress must still act. I urge Republican leaders of both chambers to join us in this effort. Their obstruction must end. I will continue to work until we have achieved comprehensive immigration reform that secures our families, spurs our economy and upholds our American values. I thank Senator Hirono for chairing today's important hearing.

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