

**Testimony of Mitchell Soto Rodriguez**  
**Before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**“Dream Deferred: The Urgent Need to Protect Immigrant Youth”**  
**May 8, 2024**

Good morning. Thank you Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Graham for the opportunity to testify today. I am Officer Mitchell J. Soto Rodriguez, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my journey as a DACA recipient and now, proudly, as a police officer serving the city of Blue Island.

In the summer of 2005, my parents made a courageous decision on my behalf to uproot our family from Mexico, seeking a better and safer future for us here in the United States. I vividly recall the moment we reunited in Blue Island, IL, marking the beginning of our new life. I was in the fifth grade. However, the transition was not without its challenges. From navigating language barriers to experiencing the uncertainty of undocumented status, each obstacle shaped my path and came to define my entire life.

My family journey was not easy. I have experienced incredible moments of joy and celebration, like buying our first American home and expanding our family. I have also lived through incredibly difficult times. I was denied a driver’s license due to lack of documentation and I had to watch my parents sleep out of a car after my dad was unable to find a job quickly due to our immigration status.

One pivotal moment occurred in my sophomore year of high school when I was in a car accident. The police officer who came to the scene showed compassion and assisted my mom even when she did not speak English. Due to my mother not having a driver’s license due to her undocumented status, I had my driver’s permit and the officer encouraged me to not be scared and drive the car back home the way he explained the situation and the process to me and my mother. That moment planted the seed of my aspiration to serve in law enforcement. However, as I pursued this dream, I encountered nothing but barriers and limitations.

In 2012 when President Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals known as DACA, my life changed again. A huge door opened to continue pursuing my goals. DACA was the key for me to continue my education and get a job after High School.

I got my first job as a cleaning attendant at a laundromat in Blue Island, IL, and continued my education. I attended Moraine Valley Community College from 2013 to 2016. I graduated from Moraine Valley with two associate’s degrees, in Criminal Justice and Liberal Arts. Based on the degree and the career I wanted I got a scholarship to attend Lewis University.

Despite excelling academically and professionally, my lack of citizenship continued to be a constant limitation to my ability to succeed, provide for my family, and contribute to my community. I had to leave Lewis University when my sister graduated from high school to help her attend school. Even though I had a scholarship I still needed to pay about 9k out of my pocket.

Knowing that DACA was providing me with a work permit to work legally in the country was a blessing but at the same time, it was holding me back from getting into the field I was studying for. For a long time, I could not apply to be a police officer because of my DACA status. I realized that a career in law enforcement was going to take time to achieve, and there could be a possibility of never achieving it and it just remains a dream.

But I did not give up. In 2019, I registered at Governors State University to complete my bachelor's degree in criminal justice. While attending school I was working full-time. I was able to manage my time to do homework and attend classes. I got a job as a school security guard for Eisenhower High School, the same High school I graduated from. Through that job I worked closely with the police department and I met Chief Farr and Commander Sepessy of the Blue Island Police Department.

In May 2022, I graduated from Governors State University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with honors Magna Cum Laude.

Chief Farr advocated for Blue Island to change its rules on hiring DACA recipients as police officers, and finally in 2023 the Blue Island Government changed their rules. Once I heard the news, I submitted my application right away and got hired as a Part-time Police Officer. On February 14, 2023, I got sworn in and on March 11, 2023, I started training in the Part-Time academy. This year, I finally completed my training, passed the test, and got hired as a full-time Police Officer for the Blue Island Police Department. Now, I know two other DACA recipients who are training to be police officers.

Having DACA allows us to become successful in life and to make a difference in the country that has seen us grow up. For many of us, the countries we come from are just in our memories. The only country we know is here where we stay. This is our home, the country that many of us provide to, we serve proudly. If DACA recipients had pathways to citizenship, it would be in favor of the economy of the country because we would still support the country without fearing if DACA one day is going to get removed and all our lives go back into limbo and not be able to continue with our current jobs or continue our education.

Providing Dreamers with pathways to citizenship isn't just a matter of fairness; it's an investment in the future of our nation. It's a moral imperative. It's the protection of the American dream. By embracing solutions to provide Dreamers permanent solutions that are only possible through legislation, Congress can finally do its part to harness the talents and potential of millions of individuals like myself who call this country home. The economic and social benefits of fully integrating Dreamers into our communities, would be a massive boost for our families, communities and country who all have come to see our contributions over the last 12+ years of DACA protections. All we want is to pursue our dreams without fear of deportation or discrimination.

As a police officer, I understand the importance of safety and security. However, even in uniform, I am reminded of the limitations imposed by my DACA status. If DACA were to end, my career in law enforcement would end and my life would go back to when I came to this country, I would lose everything, my job and probably even my home, and I wouldn't be able to support my family financially.

Senators, I urge you to consider the human stories behind the policy debates. Behind each statistic is a Dreamer with hopes, dreams, and aspirations. We are not asking for handouts; we are asking for recognition of our humanity and our contributions to this nation.