

**Testimony of Michelle Root, Mother of Sarah Root
Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
“H.R. 6, American Dream and Promise Act of 2021”
Tuesday, June 15, 2021**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify today on an important topic. I’m here today to honor my daughter, Sarah, who was murdered by an illegal immigrant who was driving drunk on my daughter’s graduation night. Sarah had just received her college degree, earned a 4.0 grade point average, and was ready for the best years of her life. She was taken too soon because people failed to follow our laws and the administration at the time failed to secure the border. To date, justice has not been served and her killer remains on the loose.

Sarah was my only daughter and she made me want to be a better person because she was so kind and loving. She put others before herself, and no matter how busy she was, she made time for friends and family. She was smart and worked hard. She treated people with kindness and had a great relationship with her only brother, my son Scottie. She wanted to pursue a master’s degree after college. My baby girl had dreams. Sarah was a true dreamer. And, her dreams were crushed because people believe they can enter this country and carry out criminal actions without recourse. And because some members of Congress are determined to let them.

The man who murdered my daughter entered the country illegally. He came in as an unaccompanied minor, committed additional crimes, drove while intoxicated, smashed his truck into my daughter, and then ran away after posting a \$5,000 bond. His bail was less than what it cost to bury my baby. He was never convicted. Yes, this happened during the Obama administration when the policy was to catch and release, ignore sanctuary cities, and turn a blind eye to illegal immigration in the interior of our country. Unfortunately, those failed policies are back and the Biden administration has continued to endorse the lawlessness.

I’m here today to say that legislation rewarding illegal behavior is dangerous, and it’s a threat to our rule of law. As a parent, I sympathize with those who want a better life for their children. We would all do what it takes to give them a perfect life. However, you have to understand that rewarding illegal behavior only means we get more of it. The Dream Act, if enacted into law, would benefit people who are *charged* with crimes. It would legalize people in this country who have even been *convicted* of violent crimes. This isn’t about rewarding valedictorians and dreamers – just look at the startling data related to those who received DACA under President Obama.

According to USCIS, nearly 60,000 DACA recipients had arrest records – some with assault and battery, rape, murder, and drunk driving. In their study, about 200 people who requested DACA had *10 or more* arrests --- and one fourth of them had their case approved! Nearly 8,000 DACA requesters had an arrest after their grant was approved and prior to renewal. And, yet, under the Dream Act, anyone with DACA would get a conditional Green Card, unless the person had done something *after* getting DACA that would make them ineligible. These are the people you are rewarding, and that only gets worse if this bill is signed into law.

Allow me to talk about a few problems with the House bill, which is the subject of your hearing.

- This is a legalization bill for more than children. There are no age limits. And parents who intentionally put their children in harm's way or allow them to remain unlawfully in the country will benefit from the legalization. This isn't about kids – it's about making sure *every* illegal immigrant can qualify for amnesty.
- This is a legalization bill for criminals. Only those convicted of certain crimes are ineligible – but even those convictions can be waived by the Secretary and no doubt they would be by this administration whose sole motive is to disregard the law in the name of family unity. Charges – even for the most serious criminal offenses – are completely ignored.
- This is a legalization bill for illegal immigrants not even connected with the DACA program. It would legalize millions more, including those who have been in the U.S. under other visa programs and those who were granted a *temporary* stay while their country faced hardship.
- The bill allows illegal immigrants who have been deported from the United States to apply. The taxpayers have already expended their hard earned money to support the government in giving these people due process and removing them. They will now be rewarded with legal status and citizenship.
- The bill protects people who simply apply by giving them safe harbor to remain in the United States while their application is pending.
- The bill is unfair to American students as they seek to enter college by allowing states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition, but not out-of-state American citizens. Hard working Americans are going to foot the bill for the education of millions of people who broke our laws.

These are only a few of the key problematic issues with the Dream Act. On top of those flaws, it lacks any enforcement, strong border security measures, oversight mechanisms, and accountability. The bill simply fails to protect Americans. Why can't Congress simply agree to make gang members and drunk drivers inadmissible and deportable? How many times are we going to allow people to drive drunk before we detain and deport them?

This committee needs to urgently consider bills like Sarah's law. This bill, in honor of my daughter, would require the government to detain someone who entered the country illegally, violated the terms of their immigration status or had their visa revoked, and is thereafter charged with a crime resulting in the death or serious bodily injury of another person. I thank those who have sponsored this bill, including my home state Senators Grassley and Ernst.

Another key provision of Sarah's law – which is missing from the Dream Act -- would ensure that there's an office for the American people devoted to helping them when they are harmed or

affected by the actions of illegal immigrants. An office that does this – the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement, or “VOICE” office – was established by the Trump Administration, and without it, many families would have nowhere to turn to find answers and seek justice. This office has helped many families like mine, and it appears the Biden administration wants to dismantle it. In fact, last week, they changed the name of the office and vowed to help illegal immigrants who claim to be victims to gain access to support services, diminishing its sole mission of helping Americans. The administration also removed the VOICE office’s most wanted list from their website – including my daughter’s killer, Edwin Mejia. They want to abolish ICE and get rid of any law enforcement whose mission it is to carry out our immigration laws and protect the homeland. I urge you all today to make the VOICE office stronger. Make sure it’s included in any bill that passes this body. Put American families first -- - give other moms and dads an avenue to get answers.

Today, thanks to this administration’s policies, local jurisdictions are handicapped from helping, and federal law enforcement officers are being told to stand down. There is no trust in the federal government to carry out our laws -- which is why this is not the right time for this hearing and it’s the absolute wrong time to trust the administration to carry out the bill, if signed into law.

Let me close by saying that it has been five years and five months since we lost Sarah. The pain doesn’t go away and everyday I grieve her loss. I hope none of you ever have to endure what I have. I know people come here to live a better life, to live out their dreams. My family, like many American families, holds no ill will toward people who desire the American dream. But, there have to be limits and boundaries. People need to be vetted and they have to be deported when not eligible for immigration benefits. We cannot forget that our laws are intended to keep us safe – and this legislation doesn’t do that. It rewards the illegal behavior that my daughter’s killer carried out. It excuses their criminal histories and does not make America better.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and to share my daughter’s story.