

**STATEMENT OF YONGJIE YANG, PH.D.**

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**SUBMITTED TO  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
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INTERNATIONAL LAW**

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Madam Chairwoman, Congressman King, Members of the Committee. Good morning. I am honored and grateful to share my experiences with this panel, and I hope that these will highlight America's need to change the laws regarding high-skilled immigrants.

My name is Yongjie Yang. I was born in China and have lived in the United States since 2000 when I entered the graduate program in neuroscience and genetics at Iowa State University. I was awarded a Ph.D. in 2005, the same year my wife got her Master's, also from Iowa State, which is known throughout the world as a leading institution in my field.

I am now a research scientist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. I investigate pathogenic mechanisms in neurodegenerative diseases. That is, I am helping to advance human knowledge about how certain kinds of diseases develop, including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and ALS, which is also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Our lab is one of the leading labs in the research of Lou Gehrig's disease in the world. All of these cruel and often fatal diseases have certain characteristics in common. Scientists all over the world work on understanding these common characteristics, noting similarities and differences, seeking to find effective therapies.

We all hope to find a cure.

On a personal note, I married my wife while we were both at Iowa State University. She is also a specialist in neurodegenerative diseases. We have a US citizen daughter and just bought a house in Ellicott City, Maryland.

I have H-1B status, which will expire next year. My immigrant visa petition was approved more than a year ago, in February 2007. That means that the U.S. government formally recognized that my skills are needed in this country – but there will not be an immigration visa available for me until at least 2009, if not much later. In fact, no one knows when I will finally be allowed to get on the path to US citizenship.

I need to emphasize the unnecessary obstacles my immigration status poses for the kind of vital research that I do. Let me explain –scientific research is collaborative. It thrives on free inquiry, debate and accountability. It doesn't matter whether the field is

chemistry or physics or medical, like mine: we scientists need to work with and respond to each other's work to move forward. We need to talk and travel freely. And our work benefits humanity – we really can cure diseases now, provide effective therapies to relieve pain and suffering, in ways that weren't possible just a few years ago. And there is always something better, even more effective, just beyond the edge of our knowledge. We seek that.

As I understand it, the whole point of the employment-based immigration system is to turn highly-skilled foreigners into Americans, to keep talent in the land of opportunity. To do that, the system needs to keep us here. We cannot become US citizens until we have been legal permanent residents. We cannot travel freely; we cannot take many government jobs or receive many Federal grants, without the green card – even though we are often doing very promising research or developing cutting edge technologies which can have significant economic job-creating potential. It's discouraging.

Johns Hopkins wanted to pay for me to go to an international conference in London last year, the 8<sup>th</sup> European meeting to discuss glial cells in health and disease. These are a particular kind of cells in nervous systems vital to normal brain function. But in order to get the new visa that I would need to re-enter in H-1B status after traveling from Baltimore to Britain, on the way back I would have first had to travel to China and wait for my new visa to be issued. My work for a cutting edge American research facility regarding new discoveries in pathogenic mechanism's research would have sent me to Europe, but the visa process required that I re-enter from China. The paperwork alone would have taken so long, I didn't go.

The Legal Immigrant Association was formed by scientists, engineers and other professionals in the United States. Most of Us are from China. We are learning how to be Americans. My story is not unique. One member of LIA is the database manager for clinical trials seeking a cure for cancer. He has also been approved for permanent residency – yet he still has only temporary permission to work in the US. Do we really want him to go back to China? He wants to stay here. Another member, in Texas, is an entrepreneur unable to raise money for a nano-technology business he would like to start, because even though he is eligible for a green card, there are none available. Do we want him to go back to China, to create those jobs there, when he wants to stay and create them here?

LIA members with advanced degrees from American universities do cutting edge research in high-tech fields that can help cure diseases and solve problems, creating jobs for Americans in America – but the immigration system simply does not work in America's interest.

We know this from the inside.

On behalf of LIA, I want to thank the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify, and I urge you to pass legislation that can benefit America by recognizing that putting highly

skilled, highly educated people like us directly on the path to US citizenship is in America's best interest.

Thank you.