

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the subcommittee, I want to thank you for allowing me to share my story with you today. Usually I like to write/speak a lot about topics I am passionate about, but today I am trying to be as concise as possible in order to make my point. My parents wanted the American Dream for my family. They brought my brother and me to this country hopping for better opportunities for both of us. They placed all their hopes and dreams in the hands of a “good attorney”. Under the idea that they were going to be able to “fix our papers”, they gave this “immigration attorney” all the money they had only to have the whole “law firm” disappear a few weeks later. I was only 13, going on 14 years old when all this was going on. I never actually understood my situation until the time to graduate from High School came. Everybody was so excited about going to college. I was very excited too; I had taken several Advance Placement exams and dual-enrollment classes at my local community college and I was ready to go to the next chapter of my life. But it was when I started filling out applications for out-of-state universities that I realize I did not have something called “SSN”. My friends laughed when I asked them what this abbreviation meant. I had no clue but that little number was going to change my life from that point on.

Thank God I had one of the best school counselors in my High School. Her last name was Salinas. My parents never went to college and could not afford the high price tag of all the universities I wanted to apply. Mrs. Salinas knew about my situation and she always encouraged me to take advantage of as many after-school programs and tracks I could find because she knew the difficulties that were ahead of me. It was just a few months before graduation when she called me because she had great news, there was a possibility for me to go to college. “House Bill 1403” became my mantra of hope since this law in Texas allowed me to pay tuition as a Texas resident. Normally, students without status have to pay as “international students” in many states, this doubles or even triples the tuition rate. However, thanks to the leadership of Governor Rick Perry back in 2001, students like me had a chance.

I graduated with honors from the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) with a bachelor of science in psychology. I was not able to apply for scholarships since back then almost all required this “SSN-thing”. I had to pay out-of-pocket for just about everything since I couldn’t get any loans. I did all kinds of odd jobs ranging from cutting grass to modeling clothes at our local mall. I worked as a tutor, personal assistant, waiter, and there was even a point of my life when I managed a spa. I had the blessing of having two angels, pillars of my life, who provided me housing, a warm meal, and an extended family while I was going to college (thank you Alejandra and Sergio). I started my own non-profit with their help and we collected food and toys for people in even greater need. We conducted bi-weekly motivational meetings to think about constructive ways we could improve our communities and our life.

I was very active in the effort to pass the DREAM Act back in 2010. I was the president of our local coalition of “dreamers” and with the help of Congressman Hinojosa and (in my opinion) the best president UTPA has had, Dr. Robert Nelsen, I was able to present the case for the DREAM Act to our Texas Senators at the time. As you might remember, the bill passed in the House but on December 18, 2010, it failed in the Senate. That very morning was my graduation. It was Dr. Nelsen’s words “*this is not over, you still have much to dream*” that helped me during the severe depression that came to my life after that happened.

Thanks to the “Morton memos” and an extraordinary immigration attorney, I was able to move to Houston, finish a certification in web design, and learned on my own HTML5, CSS3, Ruby, Javascript, PHP, and WordPress application development. After working for one of the best website design firms in Houston, I started my own company with the help of my best friend (Jorge) who helped me “expand my wings and dream of a better life”. Today, my web design firm, Alexwebmaster.com, has two employees, a manager, and a portfolio of over 90 clients in plastic surgery, real estate, ecommerce, psychology, and many other markets. We provide strategic social media marketing and search engine optimization along with innovate mobile-friendly web design. My background caught the attention of the UTPA Director of Continuing Education and she invited me to teach digital marketing and web design classes at UTPA.

Today, I could not be happier. I live with an extraordinary woman (Nadia) in a beautiful 5 room house. I proudly pay my taxes, love my country and I am thankful for all the opportunities it has given me. Because I understand how important education is, I am currently working on my masters in information technology (MSIT). I do not manage my own company right now because I essentially got recruited-away from it. I am currently helping the Office of Graduate Studies at UTPA with their online and international marketing efforts. Along with some friends in the MSIT program, I am working on an application to “document your life” using Google Glass. I was selected by Google in 2013 to be one of the first people to have this new kind of wearable technology.

I am very fortunate to live in Texas. Because of the help of all the college preparation programs I participated back in High School, the “Texas DREAM Act”, the leadership from our president, and the benefits of attending one of the most affordable universities in the United States (UTPA), I am who I am today. There is a lot of hidden talent in minority and low-income students; all it takes for many of them to shine is the opportunity