



Statement of Omaha Together One Community in support of LB 947



By Mary McKeighanne

It is amazing how you can take one simple step across the threshold of a doorway and it leads you into a whole new world less than 70 blocks from your front door.

That was what happened to me when I left my home in Ralston and stepped into a small room at South High School to volunteer in helping students work on their scholarship essays. Many of the students we assisted were immigrants--some documented, some undocumented-- and some were classified as Dreamers or DACA students.

The work I have done with South HS students over the last three years has taken me on a unbelievable journey which has gotten me to this point to speak to you today. After having read many essays, I have learned that many students have worked to overcome incredible hardships to achieve not only academic success but also to volunteer in their communities.

After working with these students, I knew I had to learn more about immigration in this country so I went to a meeting of Omaha Together One Community, a coalition of 30 congregations and community organizations in Metro Omaha. OTOC wants to see this bill passed. I learned more about why these young people were brought here by their parents as children to flee violence and poverty. I learned how these children worked hard in school so they could be the first in their families to finish high school and go to college or develop a trade so they could contribute to their family and community.

One student I met during my first year of helping students embodies who I have met on this journey. He was a quiet shy young man who was a senior. I usually have to interview the students to get them to tell me what they have actually achieved. I asked him if he had any college credits and he said he had 18. He was also ranked third in his class. Despite terrible family and personal hardships this young man had excelled in high school.

In the past 3 years I have read many essays and now young Dreamers have faces for me. They have stories which inspire me. They have hearts filled with Hope for a better life. They have determination which is exhibited by their achievements. And they have talents which they share by volunteering in their communities. Now they are in our colleges and graduating. I see their faces as a nurse, a policeman, a doctor, a lawyer, an electrician or an engineer. They will fill jobs which need to be filled in our state. And also they can speak 2 languages.

I think of how the Nebraska football teams actively recruit talented sports players to make a winning team. For us to have a winning team of state workers we need to add this talent to our state. It is simple to do-they are educated and ready. We just need to allow them to have commercial and professional licenses. Let these hard working, achieving, educated students bring their gifts of who they are to us. Let our state benefit from their skills. They are lawfully present in the United States under federal law. We will be the beneficiaries. OTOC asks you to support this bill.