

<http://somatosphere.net/2020/open-letter-to-senator-jack-reed.html/>

## Open Letter to Senator Jack Reed

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By Argenis Hurtado Moreno

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Providence, RI 02912  
June 22, 2020

Jack Reed  
Senator of Rhode Island  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reed,

Thursday was an important and necessary victory for DACA recipients. [The Supreme Court ruled against Trump](#), expressing:

“We do not decide whether DACA or its rescission are sound policies. The wisdom of those decisions is none of our concern. Here we address only whether the Administration complied with the procedural requirements in the law that insist on ‘a reasoned explanation for its action.’”

I spent many nights awake, restlessly worrying about the Supreme Court Judges reversing the Obama-issued order that allowed me and many others to remain with our families, granted us work authorization, made higher education more accessible, and bettered our economic standing. I was relieved by the Supreme Court decision. It means that I will be able to continue living in the country I have called home since I was three years old and that I will be able to continue working towards my academic goals.

Still, **DACA IS NOT ENOUGH**. The SCOTUS decision [may not hold](#), but even if it does, it only benefits [643,560 people](#)— about 5% of the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the US. I need you to do more for all of us.

My name is Argenis Hurtado Moreno, and I am one of your new constituents. In September I'll begin my Doctorate in Anthropology at Brown University. I will be Brown's only DACAmented Ph.D. student, and

while this may appear to be an astounding feat, it isn't entirely surprising—only about [4% of DACA beneficiaries hold a bachelor's degree](#) and fewer pursue post-graduate education.

You're probably familiar with stories similar to mine—the young, smart, “hard-working” immigrant who perhaps graduated at the top of their class and has a full-ride to a prestigious university. But missing from these success stories are the women whose invisibilized care and labor produce so-called “model immigrants” like me. These women's experiences are rarely, if ever, at the center of policymakers' conversations on immigration. Their lived experiences—along with that of immigrants who do not demonstrate qualities of the imagined “model immigrant”—are silenced and disregarded by policymakers and the laws they advocate for and enact.

**I need you to use your privileged position to advocate for a pathway to citizenship that is accessible to all who seek it and not just those who can prove they are smart enough, Ivy League-bound, working as a [Covid-19 first responder](#), or somehow more valuable than people like my mom and sister.**

I want to tell you about them because they have taught me valuable life lessons and they have shaped my perspective immensely. Their care, labor, and decision to migrate to the U.S. have helped me get to Rhode Island and Brown. My contributions as a “model immigrant” for the benefit of the U.S. economy and society are also very much their contributions.

My mom hates cooking, but you wouldn't know this if you tasted her meals, because they are phenomenal. When she was young, in Mexico, her mother would tease her because she didn't know how to cook an egg. Her mother would tell her often that no man would ever want to marry her because men don't like women who aren't useful. My mom did marry, but only because my dad kidnapped her (something that is all too common, even in the US, when patriarchy goes unchecked). She crossed the border into the US in 1996, the reason being that her marriage was not a happy one, and she had a pair of children who depended on her. With her first paycheck, she paid a Coyote to bring me and my sister over from Mexico to Phoenix, Arizona, where they presently reside.

In the early 2000s, my mom's health began to decline. Undocumented immigrants, who frequently do hard and dangerous work, have limited access to adequate healthcare. Unable to get a diagnosis in the US, she briefly returned to Mexico where she learned that she had lupus, a severe auto-immune disease.

My mom's body and memory are severely affected by her condition.

Today she is on hemodialysis, and her recollection is fading—specialists call this ‘lupus fog.’ She hoped that when her youngest daughter, who was born in the US, turned twenty-one, she would be able to petition for a green card for her. After all of these years of living and raising children and grandchildren in this country, my mom has only a temporary work permit (granted after being detained by Phoenix police and processed for deportation), which over the years has cost us thousands of dollars to renew. Now, even though my younger sister has reached age 21, my mom is not hopeful about gaining permanent residency. She’s discouraged by the way the current administration talks about immigrants. She’s afraid she’ll be denied and sent back to Mexico to die far away from us.

My mom once expressed to me, “there’s no point in applying for residency now because I’ll become a public charge and then all that money will have gone to waste.”

My mom is somebody. She deserves full equality and justice.

The second person I will tell you about is my older sister—a kind and endearing person. She is the type of person that helps others no matter whether or not she receives anything in return. I envy this about her. She is also a DACA beneficiary, but she is not the DACAmented person that news stories call “model immigrants” or deem deserving of citizenship.

My sister struggles to speak English and reading is difficult for her. She didn’t do well in school and dropped out when my mom’s health began to decline. She started working and contributing toward our family’s growing financial needs. At 29, and with three children of her own, she returned to school to get her GED and satisfy the DACA requirements. She now works as a custodian with my mom.

Popularized narratives of exemplary undocu/DACAmented scholars unjustly devalue my sister’s experiences of getting by, day by day. She may not feel confident in her language skills, but she is still a scholar in her own ways. She is the primary caregiver to our mom. She helps our mom at medical visits, and frequently does skilled translation work with physicians, health workers, administrators, and attorneys. My sister is an expert application reader and document-filler. She understands the language regarding “acceptable” documentation and which institutions participate in loopholes that put moral ethics over bureaucratic gatekeeping. She navigates this country well—perhaps better than I do.

As an anthropologist, I document the stories of undocumented/DACAmented experiences, primarily those of women with little to no formal education—women without extensive CVs or well-paid jobs. Women

like my mom and sister are the kind of people that get left out of the conversation. Women whom you and your colleagues tend to ignore. And I ask you, please, don't ignore them.

Senator Reed, you've held your position since 1996—that's the same year that my family and I migrated to the US. I can only infer that you've got a grasp on how conversations about immigration have changed throughout the years. In 2006, regarding the Immigration Reform Bill, you stated:

“People wishing to become citizens must play by the rules, hold a steady job, pay fines, and learn to speak English....At the same time, the bill recognizes a group of hardworking people who are here seeking a better life for their families, paying their taxes, and making positive contributions to society. They came to America for the same reasons that many of our ancestors did.”

First and foremost, the colonists that came to this country didn't play by the rules. They stole this land. [What's now known as Rhode Island belongs to Narragansett, Niantic Eastern, Nipmuc, Pequot, and Wampanoag peoples](#). This country is built on the displacement and enslavement of people. Further, how do you expect a working mother of three to learn English while maintaining multiple low-paying jobs in order to buy groceries and pay bills?

Your website says you consider yourself a staunch supporter of the DREAM Act, but **the DREAM Act isn't enough. Even the DREAM & Promise Act is not enough.** You describe the DREAM Act as legislation that gives “bright, law-abiding, hard-working immigrant students who serve in the military or attend college an opportunity to earn legal status.” Your unfair rhetoric leaves out many immigrants who aren't college students and have no intention of joining the military. They are hardworking, yes, but even that characteristic leaves out disabled immigrants unable to work. The definition of labor in such immigration policies further devalues the work undertaken by mothers: housework, childcare, kin-keeping, etc.

Someone's welcome into this country should not depend on their economic value. Still, my mom and sister are extremely valuable economically. They've gotten me to where I am today. And [immigrants like them have given their lives to this country, sustaining it during the coronavirus pandemic](#). But more importantly, my mom and sister are human beings. That alone should be enough to garner respect, dignity, and recognition. Their economic contributions, while important, cannot be the main reason for their protection. The main reason must be basic

humanity.

As much as I worry about my future, I worry more about theirs. If I were to get deported, I could possibly rely on my prestigious and privileged academic networks to apply for a student visa to return to the US. But for my mom and sister, these safety nets do not exist. What happens to them and our family if one or both of them get deported? The same worry holds true for [over 16 million families in the US that consist of at least one unauthorized migrant](#). Those who make and enforce immigration policies need to make a conscious effort to think beyond the discursive constructions of “model immigrants” and “good citizens,” and create inclusive pathways toward US citizenship.

I would be more than happy to discuss this in further detail with you. You can reach me at 480-XXX-XXXX and by email at [argenis@brown.edu](mailto:argenis@brown.edu).

With thanks,  
Argenis Hurtado Moreno

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*Argenis Hurtado Moreno, a son of immigrants, focuses his anthropological inquiries on topics of migration, gender, race, kinship, social movements, and media. He published a contribution to Somatosphere's "Dispatches from the Pandemic" series, titled, "[El Virus: A Contagion of Racism & How Networks of Care Can Stop It](#)." You can follow him on Twitter at [@antropologoDACA](#)*

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