

Congress of the United States

Washington D.C. 20515

July 15, 2020

Lauren Alder Reid
Assistant Director, Office of Policy
Executive Office for Immigration Review
5107 Leesburg Pike, Suite 2600
Falls Church, VA 22041

RE: EOIR Docket No. 18-0002; A.G. Order No. 4714-2020, RIN: 1615-AC42, 1125-AA94, Comments in Response to Joint Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review: Department of Homeland Security; Executive Office for Immigration Review, Department of Justice.

Dear Assistant Director Reid:

I submit this comment in opposition to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), Department of Justice (DOJ) joint notice of proposed rulemaking, *Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review*. The United States has a tradition of assisting asylum seekers and refugees who cannot remain in their home countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution. America's response to asylum seekers should never originate in discrimination and cruelty and should instead uphold the ideals and principles of freedom from persecution and due process of law that the founding fathers instilled as core values of our nation. We must show compassion for all of those around the world who are impacted by ongoing conflicts and violence, as our ancestors once did for prior generations looking to reach America's shores in the pursuit of a better, safer life.

Apart from the moral argument, the proposed rule violates the United States' obligations to asylum seekers under domestic and international law. I fear that should this rule be implemented; the resulting impact would be to irreparably damage the asylum process in the United States, making it nearly impossible for anyone to seek asylum. If this rule is published as written, the United States will cease to be a leader in providing humanitarian and human rights protection to the most vulnerable among us. For more than 40 years, Congress has worked to enact legislation with the express intention of establishing a fair, humane and inclusive system for those seeking protection from persecution in the United States. This proposed rule is in direct conflict with Congressional intent.

Specifically, section 208 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) makes clear that asylum seekers are entitled to due process, stating, "Any alien who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States (whether or not at a designated port of arrival and including an alien who is brought to the United States after having been interdicted in international or United States waters), irrespective of such alien's status, may apply for asylum in accordance with this section[.]"¹

¹ 8 U.S.C. § 1158(a)(1).

This proposed rule would obstruct individuals' ability to seek asylum in the United States and restrict their due process rights by creating new and inconsistent procedures for individuals navigating the asylum system that would, in effect, make it nearly impossible for anyone to present their claims before a judge.

Additionally, the Refugee Act of 1980 was intended by Congress to establish a fair process for newly arrived asylum seekers to apply for protection. The proposed rule establishes new restrictions on the asylum process such as stripping asylum seekers of their right to seek asylum if they fail to report even one penny of income to the IRS, even unintentionally. Furthermore, an asylum seeker who has passed through two or more different countries before arriving to the United States would be banned from applying for asylum. As one of my constituent's solemnly reminds us, our asylum seekers are here because very few countries provide them the protections they seek. "When I fled my country, I passed through so many other countries to get to the United States. In these countries I saw the same conditions that I fled, or conditions that were even worse. There were drug cartels, which we do not have in my country, but are even worse. You cannot seek peace, where there is no peace. You cannot seek freedom, where there is no freedom." These proposed changes, among others, place an unreasonable burden on asylum seekers creating an unfair process and are in direct contrast with the Congressional intent of the Refugee Act of 1980. Considering the circumstances that many asylum seekers face as they flee for their lives, creating a more complex and convoluted process goes against the longstanding Congressional intent to administer uniform procedures and fair standards within the asylum application process.

According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), from 1990 to 2018 more than 600,000 individuals² were granted asylum in the United States and have gone on to become productive and contributing members of our communities across the country. Additionally, we have more than 800,000 individuals who have already applied for asylum and are awaiting a hearing or interview to present their cases, including individuals in my hometown of Denver. I implore you to consider the human consequences that this proposed rule could have, and I ask that you consider the testimony of members of my home state provided in the Appendix as they are a small representation of who stand to be severally affected by this proposed rule had such policies been in place years ago.

For example, had this rule been in effect, a person who fled a warzone in their home country would not have been granted asylum in the United States and gone on to serve our community in the medical field and start a non-profit organization to assist homeless veterans. It is my hope that you will read the testimony of my community members and see how important it is for our nation to continue to be a place open to those seeking a better, safer life as they become part of the fabric that makes our nation so strong.

It is for these reasons and the compelling testimony provided by members of my community that I oppose the proposed rule and ask that you withdraw the proposed rule in its entirety.

Sincerely,



Diana DeGette

² See Table 16. Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively or Defensively: Fiscal Years 1990 to 2018. (2020, January 06).

Member of Congress

Appendix

Testimonials of Asylees and those seeking Asylum

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 1:

Samiya Azizi

Denver, CO 80231

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, "Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review," published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on July 15, 2020. The proposed rule will amend our current regulations regarding asylum to the extent that it will make it nearly impossible for anyone to be granted asylum. We are a nation of immigrants; a nation that has welcomed the dreams of many who were seeking a new start for themselves and their families; a nation that serves as a safe haven for those escaping persecution and war. The United States is the light upon the hill for many around the world however, if we do not act now and the proposed rule is fully implemented, it will undo our asylum system.

I came to the United States from Afghanistan seeking asylum in 2002. I was born in a warzone, spent most of my formative years in a warzone, lost almost everyone in my family to the on-going wars as collateral damage, and eventually ran away from home to save my own life. What you have to understand is that no one would seek asylum if it didn't mean a chance at a better life. No one would voluntarily leave their homes at the risk of never finding home again, if it wasn't to save their lives.

I choose America to seek asylum because of the many wonderful things I had heard about this nation. The right to free speech, the freedom to practice rights, the humanity to stand up for others who are being persecuted. America was an idea of equality of opportunity, the land of the free to pursue your dreams and to be united as one, under whatever holy being you worship, while promoting equality between every single being. This is why I choose to migrate here.

If I had been unlucky to meet this proposed rule, I would not be who I am today. As a law-abiding citizen, I have been able to serve my community while learning to grow into the person that I am today. As a humanitarian, I have been able to learn 5 languages fluently so I can better communicate with my community, I have been given the opportunity to pursue my dreams in the medical field to add value to our health care system, I have been fortunate enough to start non-profit organizations for our homeless veterans, I have been able to voice my concerns and lend my voice to others that might not have the platform.

If this rule change does pass, it would be a big step towards undermining our democracy. There will be many other citizens of this earth that will be robbed of all those opportunities that I was lucky enough to receive. Imagine kids who will grow up to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, if only they are only given those educational advancement opportunities. The answer to solving world hunger, the cure to cancer,

the answers to world peace could be behind one of these minds, but we are choosing to ignore their requests for seeking refuge.

Since being granted asylum, I have been able to not only live a better life, but a safe and stable one. A life where I don't have to dress up like a little boy in order to get an education. A life where I don't have to worry about coming to a pile of rubbles where once my home was. A life where I can choose to be who I am. A life where I can work hard, and contribute to my economy, my community and my country. A life in which I can exercise my basic human rights.

Who would we be as human beings if we turned a blind eye to others' cries for help?

Again, I strongly oppose this proposed rule change and urge you to reconsider this proposed change.

Thank you in advance.

THE DUALITY OF MY HYPHENATED EXISTENCE

From the moment I opened my eyes, all I had ever known was the battlefield of chaos.

Not a battle in sight to be won in years, against all worldly odds.

The destruction of civilization in the environment I grew up in was constantly being drowned in the tidal waves of war.

Unsure if you were the next target for another bombing, which never seem to hit home too far.

Decades of on-going war has torn through everything, not leaving a single family intact.

Displacing many, who ran for their lives towards other borders, on a map.

I stood in front of my entire life, as it lied in ruins at my feet.

Trying over and over again to raise my own little kingdom from the ashes of the warzone around me, so bittersweet.

I watched my entire world burned down as collateral damage, unsure if I would ever be whole.

My entire world faded but nothing compared to the destruction that it left inside my soul.

I broke the ocean in half, to find nothing that wants me on the other side.

This is the complex duality of my hyphenated existence, multiculturally diversified.

They ask me where I am from, and I just want to scream EARTH!!!
Been running away from men dressed in greed, war and blood, ever since birth.

A victim in my own home, and everywhere else I go in the world.
I am a child of this universe, unsure which lines on a map, define my worth.

Still, I carry every heartbeat of my motherland,
To the rhythm of bettering humanity, right here in my hands.

My mother sacrificed everything so that I can stand here today with determination.
To become a symbol of hope, a bridge between two different nations.

Afterall, we are all children of this earth, and shoulder to shoulder we shall stand.
To cross any border to seek asylum, even if our hearts are split between two lands.

Samiya Azizi

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 2:

Beshir

Denver, CO 80247

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, "Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review," published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on July 15, 2020. The proposed rule will amend our current regulations regarding asylum to the extent that it will make it nearly impossible for anyone to be granted asylum. We are a nation of immigrants; a nation that has welcomed the dreams of many who were seeking a new start for themselves and their families; a nation that serves as a safe haven for those escaping persecution and war. The United States is the light upon the hill for many around the world however, if we do not act now and the proposed rule is fully implemented, it will undo our asylum system.

I came to the U.S. and applied for an asylum in 2017 and was granted an asylum in the same year (2017). I applied for asylum because of fear of persecution for being from a certain ethnic group and not willing to be a member of those in power (the ruling party in the country) and work with them which led me to go through a lot of atrocities.

Since I was granted an asylum, I have been working hard to be a productive community member who can have a positive impact in the community where I live with. I have engaged myself in acquiring important skills that would make me an example for other fellow community members that share similar background with me.

I have not traveled through a third country during my trip to the USA and never have the chance to stay in another third country. The only option I had was to apply for asylum here in the USA. If I have not had the opportunity to apply for an asylum, the only option I had was returning back home and being in the hands of those bloody government cadres and persecuted like the rest of my fellow colleagues who were not ready to be their members. If the asylum rule (law) was changed and I was not granted an asylum and I had to back to my country, certainly I would have been in one of the detentions that I accustomed to just only because of my ethnic background and not having similar views with those in power.

My dream is to keep learning and become a productive community member and ultimately beside my family and take care of them both financially and physically. I have also a dream for my family members (kids) to take my foot steps and use the opportunity they have in this country and realize their dreams.

Again, I strongly oppose this proposed rule change and urge you to reconsider this proposed change.

Thank you.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 3:

S.H.

Aurora, CO 80015

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, “Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review,” published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on July 15, 2020. The proposed rule will amend our current regulations regarding asylum to the extent that it will make it nearly impossible for anyone to be granted asylum. We are a nation of immigrants; a nation that has welcomed the dreams of many who were seeking a new start for themselves and their families; a nation that serves as a safe haven for those escaping persecution and war. The United States is the light upon the hill for many around the world however, if we do not act now and the proposed rule is fully implemented, it will undo our asylum system.

In 2005, I was so excited to start working in a non-profit organization called the International Rescue Committee (IRC). IRC is an international non-government organization, their head office based in New York. It was an entry-level position in Sudan project based in Khartoum. I started as a cashier, and within four years, I was a financial specialist. I enjoyed every moment working with that organization, helping changing lives for millions of Sudanese. It was the best job I ever had. On March 3, 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al Bashir on charges of indirect responsibility for war crimes in the Darfur region. The next day we prohibited from entry to our offices. The government took over everything, offices, vehicles, bank accounts, and even our personal belongings, which we left it in our offices. At that time, the organization had over 500 local staff. I could not let them go without a fight for their rights. I, four other local staff, and the country director negotiated with the organization and with the local authorities to give the staff the six-month salary to support the employee until they find another job. IRC international approved of the fund. The hard part was to let the government agents pay the employees from the organization account, which was already in their custody. Because of our advocacy for vulnerable people, and because we were working in an American organization, they categorized us as a spy to the United States. The Sudanese intelligent agents Targeted me. I spent weeks in prison. I could not find a job because I worked with IRC before. The discrimination and the abuse I faced it in my home country forced me to leave. I did not think about asylum in the beginning. I thought it is easy to immigrate to a different country and start a new life. I traveled to Ankara, Turkey. My husband and I started a business, and it was a successful one. My children enrolled in schools. Everything was fine until the Sudanese government agents found me. They ask me to go back home. They used different ways of torture and frightened. They used verbal assault through calls, text, and even showing in the business location. They used their contact on the Sudan embassy in Ankara to close my business. One day they get to my business location stole essential documents. They made it very difficult to renew our residency. The embassy asked us to leave the country and coming back to renew the residency. I thought if I got back to Sudan I would never find a way to get back to Turkey. At that time, my sister needed help with her newborn boy. We have a valid Visa to the USA. The plan was to visit the USA to let our attorney work in our documentation to be able to return to Turkey to continue managing my business. Three months later, our lawyer informed us the Sudanese embassy requested not to renew our residency. At that moment, I decided I need to protect myself and my family by seeking asylum in the USA. I applied for asylum five years ago. Since I get

here, I felt this is the place I want to live in and raise my children. It is safe, and the power of law was something I missed all my life. I worked very hard to fix and improve myself. I am raising my children and educated them to support the USA in the best way. The USA helps us when we need it. We plan to say thank you by giving back. For example, my oldest son is great in Cybersecurity and his dream to protect the US from any attack because he believed the next war would be the technology war. In the meantime, he cannot do that because he is pending asylee. I do not dare to tell him that.

I did not mention I am pending asylee for five years. I feel safe and fear at the same time. Every moment I think what if my case denial? What should I do if they take me back to my death in my home country? What will happen to my children? The USA is their country or at least this what they feel. They built their dream here.

Again, I strongly oppose this proposed rule change and urge you to reconsider this proposed change.

Thank you.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 4:
“Alejandra Rodriguez”
Denver, CO 80221

I wish to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, “Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal: Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review.”

My name * is Alejandra Rodriguez. I entered the United States in 2014, and I was granted asylum in the United States in 2015.

I applied for asylum because my life was in danger in my home country of Honduras, along with the lives of my two children. My daughter is now 10 years old, and my son is now 15. In Honduras the father of my daughter was threatening to kill me and had other people looking for me to kill me, too. He looked for me everywhere to threaten my life.

I didn’t know he was a gang member at first. I thought he was a normal person who had worked. At one point he was in prison. He wanted me to go visit him. That’s when I realized that once I was outside the prison, he was going to have someone grab me and my daughter, then about one-and-a-half years old. They were going to kill me and take my daughter. He was her father. I had to disappear from my country. I was afraid for my life and for the lives of my children. If I died, who would my children stay with?

I did not return to my house. I stayed in hiding. I had already tried going to the northern and southern parts of Honduras, too, but his people knew where we were. That’s when I decided to leave my country. I came to the United States to ask for asylum because my father, my mother, and my brothers and sisters are here, and I thought I would be protected here.

My son and daughter and I traveled through Mexico, but he has family in Mexico, so it wouldn’t have been possible to live there or ask for asylum there. When we traveled through Mexico we were captured by a very brutal, notorious gang. We suffered terribly. We were also blessed to be taken in by people in shelters who helped us. It was a huge decision for me to leave my country, but it was the right one.

We went through Guatemala, too, and that was frightening because of the security. In Guatemala you have to show a letter from the other parent giving permission to take your children out of your country, in my case from Honduras to Guatemala. My son’s father had been murdered. Of course, I couldn’t ask my daughter’s father for permission. So, I couldn’t have asked for asylum in Guatemala. What was most important to me was protecting my children because I love my children.

Their safety matters most and here I have my life and work. In Honduras there is no work. The first court said I was going to be deported. The judge said she believed me and thought my case was credible, but could not grant asylum because she said the law would not allow it. She gave me 30 days to appeal my case. I knew this wasn’t my country and I couldn’t demand that they let me stay, but one way or another I was going to find an opportunity. I looked and looked and found Lupe and the

organization of immigrants she's part of. They helped me gather signatures for my case. I consider that I'm a good person, a hardworking woman, and all I want is the opportunity to work and have a way to raise my children. If they had forced me to leave, as soon as I arrived in Honduras I would have been assassinated because they could find me wherever I was. Then what would happen to my children?

I was able to appeal, and in 2015 I was granted asylum. When that happened, it was like having a huge weight lifted off my back.

If the law changes, I think it will not affect me directly, but it will affect other women. Other people like me want to save their lives and have a opportunity to just live and help this country. They have suffered, too. We are not criminals or people who want to do bad things.

Having my residency now, I have a sort of normal life. I am no more and no less than anyone else, but I have the possibility of living here with my children. I can go out to the street and go where I need to go. I can drive. Being able to watch my children grow is what motivates me. My children are in school and are very content here. Little by little we've overcome some of the trauma we experienced.

My dreams are to have a house someday and a small business. I'd like to be able to help this country, help other women who are undocumented and single mothers, and help my community.

Sincerely yours.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 5:

Anonymous

I applied for asylum because I was running from being persecuted by the government of my country. I stood up for my rights and was protesting the marginalization and oppression of my social group by our government.

I chose to apply for asylum in the US because it is a country that respect human rights and is a member of the UN security council, which means the US is a country that leads by example. The US is one of the few countries that can influence the UN to hold dictators accountable and make sure minorities and their rights are respected in each country.

If I was unable to apply for asylum that would mean I would never be a free man. It would also mean that I would never have the rights and freedom to exercise my right for change in my home country and around the world. We all have a voice and our voices all matter. Moreover, if I was unable to apply for asylum, my life will forever remain at risk because the government of my country has influence in other countries, where if I was unable to apply for asylum, I would be deported and definitely executed. Since the US is a very strong member of the UN Security Council they can never allow another government to have a say in anything within their territory. If I was unable to apply for asylum, no matter what, I would definitely be executed someday as long as I am out of the US.

If this rule is changed I fear for the lives of my brothers and sisters who tried to raise their voices for change and instead of listening to their demands, our government cracked down on them with systematic execution to silence their voices. If this rule changes, I strongly believe so many will lose their lives. On the dollar bill it is clearly written "in God we trust" and on the other hand, we the asylum seekers, strongly believe in "US we trust for our life." If this rule is changed, the lives of my brothers and sisters will be at serious risk and they may never live to tell the story to their children and their children's children on how their voices at one point in time had an impact.

If this rule passes, I strongly believe dictators around the world will have a boost because they will know that we have nowhere to go, so they will kill us as they like and even if we escape but then get deported, they will still have a hold on us. I strongly believe that if this rule is passed dictators and other bad leaders around the world who are above the law in their countries will celebrate. This is because when we come here and seek asylum we still hold them to account by exposing them on social media like Twitter, Facebook and the rest because even though we are thousands of miles away from home, these leaders still act with some kind of fear because we keep on exposing them. If there is no asylum, dictators and bad leaders will celebrate and act with impunity.

Ever since I was granted asylum my life has never been the same because I still have a voice for my people and I still hold a position to educate them on their rights and how we can only be better together tomorrow as a people. People now call me and ask if it's possible things can ever change and I always tell them yes in America we have the American dream, and in my country as a youth, we also have a dream and a voice and bad governments or dictators can't stop us because we are the ones who put them there. We also owe our children the responsibility to bring down the dictators when they don't listen to our demands and when they no longer represent us, and right here in the US I still exercise my right to effect positive change in my home country.

The dreams I have is when I came here I was told about the American dream, which is to never give up on what you have passion for so that's why I am still standing and fighting for my people. I owe them a responsibility to fight for what is right and fight for their future. I would not like them to point fingers at me, like I do to my parents and grandparents that they failed to secure us a brighter future.

I don't really have friends in the asylum process, but I really hope and wish them well because with asylum you can live your dream in what is called the American dream because everything is possible in America then why not asylum?

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 6:

Anonymous

I had to run from my country because the government in my country was after my life. I had to seek asylum in the United States so I could be free and alive. I belong to a group in my country that has been marginalized and oppressed since independence from the colonialists. We do not have equal rights as compared to the majority ruling government. As a result, we have been marginalized and oppressed in every way possible, severely limiting our freedom and opportunities. The government of my country came for my life because I am an activist for equal rights for my people. We protested peacefully, but the government responded with mass violence, severe retribution, and massacres of my people.

I chose to apply for asylum in the United States because from my point of view, the US was open to freedom, didn't have racism and discrimination. I also believe that the US knows about what happened during the colonization of my country and is familiar with the history and the conflict of my country. This is because the United States participated in the UN meetings with the colonizers when my country gained independence/was formed.

I would feel devastated and it would be the end of the world for me if I wasn't able to apply for asylum. I know that if I were to be deported to my country, it would be the end of my world. There are two things I know for sure: either I would remain in prison for the rest of my life, or my government would kill me.

When I fled my country, I passed through so many other countries to get to the United States. In these countries I saw the same conditions that I fled, or conditions that were even worse. There were drug cartels, which we do not have in my country, but are even worse. You cannot seek peace, where there is no peace. You cannot seek freedom, where there is no freedom. If I wanted to request asylum in Canada, I would still have to go through the United States, because it is geographically impossible to get there without passing through the US.

It has not been easy since I was granted asylum. Maybe this is because of the pandemic. But the process is extremely slow. My own asylum case was appealed after I was granted asylum, so I had to wait 30 days before I could apply for a work permit or ID. During this entire process, you cannot work until you get the work permit and other required paperwork, meaning you have no income and no medical care. Everything moves extremely slow, making things very challenging.

My dream is to bring my family to the United States, if possible and to return to my profession, which I loved. My dream is to continue to have safety and freedom.

I know many people that I left at the border or in detention. I plead for them to not be deported, because I know the people who are deported back to my country are never seen again. Their families will never see them again. Either they are imprisoned or killed. My hope is that they are granted asylum so they can be safe from harm and free once more.

Convention Against Torture (CAT) does not grant asylum-seekers true freedom. They are not really free, even though they have come to the US seeking freedom. Asylum-seekers with CAT status see people who are free, and even though they are not imprisoned, they are not truly free because of the

strict conditions of CAT status. All of us have families and most have kids, and under CAT, they will never get to see their kids or families ever again, because they cannot bring them here, or leave the US and return.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 7:

Anonymous

I applied for asylum because I was unsafe in my country. The government of my country wanted to kill me. I have known the US to practice democracy, grant free speech, and it is the best country in the world to protect people from all parts of the world.

Since I was a child growing up and watching the media, I saw America try to prevent a lot of countries from committing atrocities, killing its citizens, burning homes, and fighting. I knew America was safe compared to other countries. I knew America was free from racism and discrimination. So many of the other countries I passed through to get to America, and those I know of, don't like black people and are very racist. The US is a free country that protects everyone and treats people equally.

If I wasn't able to apply for asylum, I would have been killed. I know my life would have ended if I wasn't able to apply for asylum. If I hadn't been granted asylum I would consider myself dead because I had nowhere to go in this world. I am so happy the US gave me the opportunity to apply for asylum. If the US continues to give asylum-seekers the opportunity to apply for asylum, it will help a lot of people live, who otherwise will be killed by the dictators in their own countries.

If the rules change, I don't know what will happen to the people I know with pending asylum cases because this is truly their last hope. They cannot return to their home countries. Changing any rules that make it impossible for them to stay here will mean they will die.

My life has changed since I was granted asylum. The day I was granted asylum, I saw the proverbial Northern Lights and I saw myself living again, because I was a living corpse before I was granted asylum (the chance to live). I thank the US government for granting me asylum. I am so happy here because I know my life is protected. I wish everyone else's life will also be protected like mine, those who are still waiting for their asylum cases.

My dreams for myself are to remain faithful, respectful, and abide by the laws of this country, as long as I live in this country. America is a country where you can achieve any dreams if you work hard enough. I pray to God to give me the strength and opportunity to work hard to fulfil my dreams for the betterment of this country and help America in one way or another, as well as my own family, and the rest of the world.

I know a lot of people that are currently seeking asylum, and there are many complications in their cases. It is so difficult, frustrating, and terrible for their them. Basically, their lives depend on the decisions of the US government. If they are not given the opportunity to stay here, they have no other hope. These asylum-seekers are so stressed, confused, and worried, I don't even know how they breathe, because their survival depends on the US government asylum laws. Their lives depend on the US government.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 8:
Anonymous

I applied for asylum because the government of my country wanted to kill me because of my involvement in a political group. I chose to apply for asylum in the US because I knew that the US is a world power that respects human rights. If I was unable to apply for asylum, I would have been dead by now, because I was being hunted by my government. I had nowhere else to go. I chose to come here because the US protects human rights, protects people from harm, does not discriminate, and takes care of asylees and refugees.

If this rule changes, asylum-seekers from my country will be sent back and they will definitely be killed. If this rule changes, asylum-seekers from my country will have nowhere to go to seek safety; they will be jailed, tortured, and killed in my country.

It was a great relief to me to be granted asylum. It is a new dawn to me and a new hope that I will be able to change something and help those in my own country who are being persecuted. Before I got asylum, I was living in darkness and had no life. I started life from zero and had renewed hope when I was granted asylum. Because of the help of the US government, I know I might be able to help others who are in the same situation that I was in.

My dreams for myself are to become a useful person and help all those that are in need. I like to be a brother to the brotherless, a father to the fatherless, I want to be a humanitarian to those in need. I also want to better the life of my family and help them as they are fleeing for their lives and bring them here to safety with me.

I know a few people in the detention centers with pending asylum cases. My hope is that they have the same opportunities as I did to get asylum. If they are sent back, they will surely be killed. Even when they are sent back, they have no home or families—their homes are destroyed and their families have been massacred. They have absolutely nowhere to go. I plead to the authorities of the US to do everything in their power to help and protect asylum-seekers because they truly have nowhere to go, and the US is their last true hope and resort.

When we were fleeing our countries, we didn't have any time to gather our documents or funds. We just had to run with whatever belongings we had, and we didn't know where we would end up. When we arrived in the US and applied for asylum, so many of us did not have the necessary documents to support our asylum applications. Many of us do not even have the means to get those documents from our home countries to build a document-based case for asylum in the US. Many of our families have been entirely massacred and we have no one in our country to send us the required documents, photos, or evidence to prove our case. I would like the US government to understand the situation in our country and know that we had to flee out of sheer necessity because our lives were in severe danger. We endured a terrifying, extremely difficult, and deadly journey to seek asylum in the US because this is the only country where we knew we would be safe.

I plead with the US government not to base the validity of our asylum case entirely on the availability of documents as evidence of our persecution.

I want the US government to know where we are coming from. If there was peace and freedom in my country, we would never leave. We would never undertake such a deadly journey, not knowing if we would survive, to come here, if things were tolerable in our own country. It is like do or die: if you go, you might survive, if you stay, you definitely die.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 9:

Anonymous

We are all humans and from a Christian point of view we are all created in the image and likeness of God. No country should stand alone or block its borders from those seeking protection. We should live in harmony in this world. Humans are supposed to be treated with respect and equality, but unfortunately it is heartbreaking because in some parts of the world humans are violated and treated worse than animals. Asylum is very important as it creates a safe haven in the USA for those who are being persecuted because of their political opinion, membership to a particular social group, race and religion. I would proceed by saying USA is the best country to run to when your life is at risk because it has one of the best democracies in the world, one of the best justice systems, and protects human rights.

In the yesteryears, U.S.A had very good policies for asylum seekers but the new changes that the administration in power is trying to implement are quite cruel and very difficult for asylum seekers. I would begin by talking on the point where the regime in power wants to remove gender from a subgroup that qualifies people for asylum as members of a particular social group. This is quite unfair to women as women are more vulnerable to all sorts of persecution based on their gender. A good example is Female Genital Mutilation, which happens in many African countries.

Further, the government will make things even more difficult for asylum seekers if they require them to show even more proof of persecution before they qualify for any form of protection in USA. No one is happy to run away from their home country and risk their life to travel through dangerous countries and terrain, such as the Darrien Gap, to get to USA if the persecution in their country was not serious. Not everyone has to be arrested, incarcerated, or tortured in their home country to prove that their life is at risk.

I would like to cite an example of myself as an asylee. My family and I really feel welcomed to USA by virtue of the Immigration Judge granting me asylum. I am more comfortable with this form of protection as it offers so many advantages for me and my family and I hope and plan to impact this nation positively in my own little way.

I think asylum is the best form of protection to be granted and asylum rules should not be tightened because immigrants equally contribute positively towards the welfare of this great nation. Withholding from removal and C.A.T are not ideal protection as they leave the immigrant with no flexibility and in a sort of "limbo" status, without true freedom.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 10:

Anonymous

I applied for asylum because of political persecution. I was persecuted by the military in my country and I was tortured. I chose to apply for asylum in the United States because it is one of the few countries in the whole world that promotes and grants human rights. If I wasn't able to apply for asylum, my life would be in danger and I would be very frustrated and hopeless. My life was in danger in my country, and if I couldn't apply for asylum, I would not be secure without a legally recognized status. I would continue to be a refugee and have nowhere to go.

If this rule change was passed, it will affect so many people on their way to seeking asylum and those who might already be here with pending asylum cases. Without a legally recognized status of "asylee" asylum-seekers will never be able to be with their children and families ever again, which is so heartbreaking. Any status, other than "asylee", does not grant people true freedom because of their extremely restrictive rules.

Since I was granted asylum, I have been very happy, and my family will soon be happy because they will hopefully join me here. I feel safe, secure, and happy, and can hope to see my children again, soon.

I thank the US government for granting me asylum and because of this, I can take care of myself and my kids. Furthermore, I want to thank the US government for the benefits granted to asylees such as Medicare, food stamps, and other assistance.

I have friends that are currently in the asylum process. One of my friends, a teacher, was also persecuted and tortured by the government in my country because she continued to teach children. I am praying that the US government grants her asylum and that this law does not go into effect, otherwise it will affect all asylum seekers.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 11:

Anonymous

I am a 31-year-old man from Cameroon, and I won asylum in March 2020. In Cameroon, I earned a Bachelor's in Science degree and owned my own business. I was doing well financially, but I had to flee Cameroon to protect my life. I am an English speaker, and the French government oppresses and commits atrocities against English-speaking Cameroonians. We are treated as outcasts, as second-class citizens. The Cameroon government has been in power for 38 years, and they are a very tricky government – they pretend everything is okay, but really, the government is killing thousands of Anglophone people. There was an incident in February of this year, when the government went and “neutralized” an entire Anglophone village. They killed even the newborn babies. It was reported by the UN representative in Cameroon and the BBC, but nothing has been done.

I participated in peaceful political protests demanding our human rights, and as a result, the French-speaking government detained me twice and tortured me. When I was detained in prison, I thought everything was gone, but I was lucky, my sister was able to bribe my way out. To be here today is by the grace of God. Somebody like me, who is wanted - what is my fate? There is no place in Cameroon where you cannot be caught. I knew that I was going to die tomorrow, or the next few days or few hours. I knew I had to leave the country.

I wanted to flee to an English-speaking country so that I could communicate, but the closest, Nigeria, is not safe; the Cameroon government could easily find me there. The people who are seeking asylum in Nigeria, some are shot and killed, others are put in prison for life. I chose to come to the United States because it is a global super power that respects and promotes human rights. I knew that if I was here, my life would be secure.

My asylum means everything to me. I feel a tremendous relief because nobody is chasing me. I feel safe. I am not hearing gunshots. I am not being arrested and tortured as I was in Cameroon. I feel like I have another home, and I can live to see tomorrow.

Since I won my asylum in March, I have been getting my life started here in the United States. I am trying to get my social security number so that I can get medical care because I am suffering from a knee injury that I sustained during the torture. I want to reunite with my family, but I don't even know if my family is alive in Cameroon. My mom is hiding in the forest. I know that the police are looking for her. I am hoping she is alive.

My dream has always been to be successful in life, to become a greater person tomorrow. That is what my dream is now. I am just thinking of going to school. I have the knowledge that with education you can do whatever you want to be. I am researching college programs to become a Registered Nurse, so that I can care for people. I wish there will be peace for all people to live in harmony.

If you see a Cameroonian here, they have gone through hell. You cannot imagine what we are going through – there are no human rights in Cameroon for English speakers. We need asylum protection. Going back to Cameroon is to either be sentenced to life in jail or to be shot and killed. Deporting someone to Cameroon would be like if a lion is chasing them and they come knock on your door asking for help, and you instead close the door, leaving the lion to kill them. When I was facing deportation, I

thought, better if you just shoot me here than send me back. If you are deporting someone from Cameroon, you are letting that person to go and die.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 12:

Darixela

Denver, CO 80204

My name is Darixela and I came to the United States to apply for asylum just over a year ago. I am Honduran and I have 5 children. Two of them were born in Honduras and 3 in Mexico. I fled Honduras with my two sons and moved to Mexico because my family, especially my brother, was being threatened by gangs.

I still feel so much fear from all of the deaths, all of the assaults I witnessed or knew about – I can't get rid of the fear, and sometimes I tremble even just taking my kids to school. I don't understand why I can't get rid of the fear, even now. In Mexico, I met my husband and we had 3 children together, but his family did not want us there and denied us water to drink and bathe in. His family threatened our lives, and since we had nowhere to live, we had to put up with it. My husband could not find jobs. There were times when we had enough for my children to eat tortillas with salt, but sometimes we didn't even have tortillas.

We decided to come to the United States because we no longer wanted to see our children endure like this. I always had the dream of coming to the United States, and we risked our lives to come here. With God's help, we managed to cross the Rio Grande on a raft that we made with an inflatable baby pool and floaties for my children.

We applied for asylum at the border and a few days later came to Denver, where we now live as we wait for our final asylum court date. I can't even express how emotional I would be if we were granted asylum. It would be so beautiful. I am too afraid to ever return to Honduras, and I am also afraid of Mexico, where we have nothing to eat and nowhere to live, and where my husband's family who threatened us lives. Even my kids pray on their own that we can stay and that we never have to return to Mexico or Honduras.

If we were granted asylum and allowed to stay, my dream and my children's dream is for them to study, to go to college, and for us to buy a home of our own one day. If our application is denied, I don't know what we would do. If the law changed and it were even harder to get asylum, this could harm our case and make it less likely that we can stay and escape the violence we fled.

I strongly oppose this proposed rule change and urge you to reconsider this proposed change.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 13:

Anonymous

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, “Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review”, published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on June 15, 2020. The proposed rule will amend our current regulations regarding asylum to the extent that it will make it nearly impossible for anyone to be granted asylum. We are a nation of immigrants; a nation that has welcomed the dreams of many who were seeking a new start for themselves and their families; a nation that serves as a safe haven for those escaping persecution and war. The United States is the light upon the hill for many around the world. If we do not act now, the proposed rule will dismantle our asylum system and exclude those very people we swore to harbor.

I came to the United States in April of 2015 and am currently in process seeking asylum. I come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country wrought with war and violence. I applied for asylum at the United States border because I was a victim of gender-based violence and torture at the hands of men who are still at large. It is unsafe for me to return to my home country.

Since coming to the United States, I have worked hard to learn the language and contribute to the local economy. I have hopes of continuing my education and improving myself and this country through the dedication of mind and work to the ideals this country stands for. Whereas in Congo, I have no family, in the United States I have made new family - friends who have supported me have become my new adopted family in a new adopted country. My life is here and I am grateful for every moment.

I urge you to consider the weight of this decision. It excludes, rather than includes, and that does not seem to be in line with the values this country stands for. Again, I strongly opposed this rule and urge you to reconsider this proposed change.

Thank you,

I remain anonymous as my asylum proceedings are not yet complete.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 14:
“Jeovani”

Hello, my name is “Jeovani” (pseudonym), and I am a 22-year-old gay man from Guatemala. I won asylum in November 2019, in Aurora, Colorado, based on my sexual orientation. I would like to share with you some of my life story.

I come from a town called San Cristobal in the Department of Totonicapan. Guatemala is a land of forests and mountains, with good people and bad people. I would like to repeat to you what an immigration official told me one day – that people kill there and kill here, kidnap there and kidnap here. He is right and I agree with him, but there are many differences in how the two countries resolve these kinds of tragedies. I have always wished that my country was like yours, where laws are respected and the authorities listen to the voice of the people. Unfortunately, my country tries to be the same, but it is not. I say that it is not because today, Guatemala, like other Central and South American countries, has much corruption, narcotrafficking, gangs, femicide, homophobia, and discrimination against indigenous people. It hurts me very much that these things happen in my country. The people who have money think that the people below them do not have the right to be heard.

I am a young gay man, and I have the right to life. Unfortunately, in my country, there are many homophobic people. I would have very much liked to have been born with parents who had stood up for me from mistreatment from others, but they did not. They gave up when I was only about four or five years old, and they tried to change me. From that age, I changed myself forever. I would like very much to speak very well of my country, but it is the opposite, and if it had been different in my country, I would never have had to flee. In my country, it is impossible to live openly as a gay man.

Now that I have asylum, I feel happy, free, and not threatened. They can’t deny me my identity here. I am living in my own home in Denver, and working in a job in a factory cleaning parts for hospitals. I am a member of an LGBT community organization where many LGBT people from all over the world gather. They give us orientations, classes, and teach me many things. I am proud to be LGBT.

My dream is to be a spokesperson for the LGBT community and to change opinions in Guatemala. I know I cannot go there in person, so maybe I will be able to advocate over the internet. I want to be a leader who can advance rights and educate people that being gay is normal, that we are not crazy or sick. It is very difficult for many people there to accept people like me.

If you have read my message and you have gotten to this point, thank you for reading. God bless you, and God bless the United States.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 15:

Anonymous

I am a 31-year-old transgender male from Jamaica. I was granted asylum in March 2020 based on my gender identity. I did not have an easy life growing up. Jamaica is not a safe country for people who are LGBT. It reached a point where I was constantly in fear for my life, that I would be killed because of my gender identity. The government does not protect people like me. That is when I decided to flee for my safety.

Going through the asylum process was very difficult. I have been through traumatic things in my life and it is difficult to talk about those things. On top of that, I was being asked to provide evidence of things dating back to when I was a child or records that I do not have access to. I worked with my lawyer to present my case to a judge.

It felt really great when I was granted asylum. I was proud that I was able to tell my story and that the judge listened to me and understood it was not safe for me to return.

Since I have been granted asylum, I've been able to meet new people and experience new things. It has been a better life for me, because I am now surrounded by people who support me and show me love. It feels very nice. I never had that before.

My dream is to own my own food truck. I love to cook and cook often for my friends here. I am also in the process of getting my GED online. I was never able to finish school in Jamaica, but I want to work hard to have a fresh start here and make more opportunities for myself.

Asylum is a necessary protection. A lot of people are experiencing things in their home countries, very traumatic and difficult things, and there is no way for them to find safety except to seek asylum.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 16:

Anonymous

I am a 36-year-old man from Cameroon. I was granted asylum in March 2020. I was born in the Southwest region of Cameroon. I earned a Bachelor's degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Buea. I had a focus on working with children in special education classes. After university, my goal was to become a guidance counselor for children with learning disabilities. However, this goal was impossible due to the situation in Cameroon and the treatment of Anglophones by the majority Francophone government. I could not get a job doing what I love. Instead, I was forced to go into the business of buying and selling cocoa.

In 2014, I joined the movement of the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC). This movement has its roots in fighting against the marginalization of Anglophone Cameroonians and fighting for our equality. Anglophone Cameroonians have suffered a long history of oppression by the Francophone government, dating back to first World War. Economically, politically, socially, everything has been taken away from Anglophone people. The SCNC was formed in the early 1990s to fight against these injustices.

I joined the SCNC in 2014 after I experienced these injustices myself. At university, most of the classes offered were in French and I was forced to learn French in order to graduate. After school, I struggled to get a government job because of my English-speaking background. Not only this, but English-speaking regions had worse schools, worse roads, no airports, and worse economy.

On October 1st 2014, I joined a peaceful demonstration in my town. The SCNC and Anglophone Cameroonians celebrate October 1st every year as a day that commemorates our independence. It was a peaceful celebration, but it was met with government brutality. As we were celebrating, the police came and shot tear gas. I was arrested with some other members of the SCNC and locked in a cell. I was detained for about 14 days. I was beaten every morning. The officers would yell at me in French, which I do not understand very well. They would call us dogs. They told me to denounce my SCNC membership, that Southern Cameroon has never been a country. We were released after human rights organizations and lawyers intervened.

On October 1st 2017, I took part in another peaceful protest. Thousands of Southern Cameroonians were there in protest. We were protesting police brutality and the marginalization of Cameroonians. Many people were shot, others were arrested and detained. I was arrested and detained for a second time. I was detained for three weeks, 21 days. I was subjected to the same mistreatment and abuse. This time, it was my mother who begged and paid a bribe to the police to release me. The police made me sign a document saying that I would never participate in a protest again.

On January 5th, 2019 I was crossing the street to buy some items from a store. The police came patrolling the neighborhood and I was among several people who were arrested. The police accused me of being a member of the SCNC and helping organize a protest that happens every year on February 11th. I was detained for a month. I was forced to sleep on the bare floor with cold water being dumped on me. Several individuals, including my mother and a human rights lawyer, struggled to secure my release. I was finally released on February 5th, 2019.

After I was released, I spent about 5 days in a hospital and then I went into hiding. During this time, a friend of the family helped make travel arrangements out of Cameroon. I knew it was no longer safe for me to stay in my country. The individual who made my travel arrangements said I was going to Ecuador to find safety in the U.S. I had never travelled outside of Cameroon before. I wanted to come to the United States because it is an English-speaking country.

When I was granted asylum I felt relieved and happy. The day I was granted asylum was also the birthday of my three-year-old daughter, who is still in Cameroon. So that day I had her in my heart when I heard the news that I would finally be safe. Growing up, I studied U.S. history and policies. I knew the U.S. was a country that respected human rights and I was proud to be here. I knew I would finally be safe.

Since I have been granted asylum, I have been respecting the stay at home orders. I am eager to get my life started here. I am grateful for my safety. My dream in the U.S. would be to continue my education so that I can one day be a guidance counselor.

I am still hearing news of what is happening in Cameroon, it is still very dangerous. My daughter is still in Cameroon, along with my mother who is currently living in hiding. I hope one day I can reunite with them. If I had not been granted asylum, I would probably be dead. The Cameroonian government would have killed me. English speakers in Cameroon are not safe because the government does not respect our rights or treat us equally.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 17:

Anonymous

I am 25 years old and I am an Anglophone from Cameroon. I won asylum in March 2020 after being detained for five months. When I was in Cameroon, I was a student and was studying human resources. After I graduated, I went back to my hometown in the northwest region to be with my mom. At this time, it was not safe in Cameroon and especially in the northwest region where my family lived. There is currently a crisis between the anglophones and francophones in Cameroon and the military are killing civilians. One day I was coming back from my job at the credit union and there was a fight between the separatists and francophones. My whole neighborhood was on fire. I got to our home and found my mom crying; everything was on fire. I struggled to understand what was going on. I learned that the separatist fighters killed someone in the military and so the military burned down our entire neighborhood. We hid in the bushes and afterwards we came back to our neighborhood. We saw journalists taking pictures of what the military had done. They asked what happened and I told them that it was the military that burned down our houses for no cause. The news made headlines in our area and the government came looking for us. The headlines made a lot of problems for us—we hid in the bushes and one night policemen ambushed us where we were hiding. We knew they were policemen based on their uniforms. I was crying for help, we were handcuffed and taken to a police station. That's when we saw hell. They arrested my mom and me and they held us for two weeks. We were beaten and raped by the police officers every single day and were given practically no food. We would have done anything to escape or for the policemen to release us.

While the police kept us in jail, there was a battle going on between the separatists and the military and many of the police officers were distracted. An anglophone officer took the opportunity to try and help us. He let us out the back door but as we were running, I got separated from my mom. I couldn't find my mom but had to stay in hiding. A few days later, an elderly man helped me contact my uncle who lived in the francophone region of Cameroon. My uncle sent someone to come get me and my uncle helped me find a way out of Cameroon. In July 2019, I arrived at the border between Mexico and the United States to ask for asylum. Instead, they gave me a number and told me I had to wait before I could request asylum in the United States. I had to stay in Mexico for three months before my number was called. I didn't have anyone to help me and I had to beg for food. Eventually, an older woman let me stay in her house.

After 3 months, they called my number and let us enter the United States. For 3 days, I slept in front of the immigration office before they let us enter. When it was my turn, I met with the immigration officials and told them I was terrified to go back home. They put me in detention first in California, and then they took me to a detention center in Arizona. Finally, they sent me to a detention center in Colorado.

After waiting for about 3 weeks, I had my credible fear interview and I told my story to the asylum office. I didn't have much information and the interview process was confusing. They told me my results would come in a couple weeks. I got my results and learned that I was allowed to see the judge about why I am afraid of going back home. I went for my first hearing before the judge alone. Later, I got a free attorney who represented me in my case. I felt better when I got a free lawyer because I had someone to look up to. I was scared to face the immigration judge alone because I had never been to

court before. It was really difficult to do that on my own and once I had a lawyer to talk to me about my case, I felt protected and gave me some hope. I wasn't as scared anymore.

I had my final hearing in March 2020. When I learned that the judge granted my case, I was happy and knew that they weren't going to send me back. I applied for asylum but at that time I wasn't eligible because of the ban at the border and so the judge gave me withholding of removal instead. The judge said that the ban was the only reason I didn't win asylum. I was released on the same day—I was very very happy. Detention was extremely difficult and I was often very frustrated. I was in one room for five months; it was not easy. Most of us in detention have been through so much back home and we come here and we are locked up. Detention increased our desperation.

My mom still lives in Cameroon and I heard that she is in danger. I am constantly worried about her. If I had won asylum, I could help protect her and apply to bring her to the United States, but unfortunately I can't help her by winning withholding of removal. Right now, I am living in Dayton, Minnesota and am thankful to be here in the United States where I am safe. When I was released from detention, I was so happy that I could talk to people again even though there are many restrictions due to the coronavirus. I am satisfied to be safe living with my aunt and to finally be out of detention. My aunt is the only family I have here in the United States. Back home, we consider close friends to be family and so even though we are not related by blood, I call her my "aunt."

Now that I am safe in the United States, I want to go back to school. I know that it is very expensive and I will have to work hard to support myself in school. I want to study medicine because I want to save lives. After going through what I've been through, I just want to help other people.

If I wasn't able to fight my case or to ask for asylum, I would have been sent back home and killed. It is hard for me to even imagine what would happen. I am heartbroken about the new rules restricting asylum because a lot of people are going to lose their lives if they can't look up to the US for protection. If I hadn't won my case, I don't think I would be living today.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 18:

Sara Gallegos

Denver, CO 80222

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, “Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review”, published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on July 15, 2020. I believe this proposed rule change not only goes against the beliefs of our country’s founding desires but is also, at its base, immoral.

Over the past 4 years, I have befriended and worked with an asylum seeker in Denver. She lived with us for a time and has become like family to us. She comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo and has been a victim of gender-based violence including what is certainly considered torture as defined by the Convention Against Torture. As such, she has very clear PTSD which manifests itself as forgetfulness, an inability to organize, anxiety, and depression. Returning to her home country, where the perpetrators roam with impunity, is not an option.

We are called as a nation to protect the unprotected, to harbor the persecuted. I have seen with my eyes how the immigrants I have worked with make our community stronger and more beautiful. I have seen it in my classrooms where I teach and in the community where I serve. I have seen it in the asylum seeker that we have invited to be like family to us.

We are a country that includes rather than excludes; We protect rather than reject; We pave new paths through love, compassion, and service. This new rule is not us and will contribute to a more broken, fractured, and hurting world *and* country. We are better with our arms extended in welcome.

I have worked extensively with more than 150 immigrant families in recent years and will continue to stand with them, whether they enter as traditional refugees or under asylum. They have changed me to my core. I stand with my Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters, rich and poor, well-educated or not, on food stamps or off. They are the heartbeat of this nation and they have my undying support and love. As a mother, as an elementary education teacher, and as a community volunteer, I strongly oppose the proposed rule change and ask you to reconsider.

Thank you.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 19:

Anonymous

I was born in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. I was granted asylum in 2019 and thank God was able to bring my daughter here to safety. I fled Burkina Faso to come ask for help from the United States to protect my 14-year-old daughter against the useless, criminal, traditional practice of female excision (“female genital mutilation/female genital cutting”).

I myself was the victim of excision two times and have suffered its many consequences throughout my life. When I was 5 years old, I was taken by my aunt to a woman that cut my vagina and sewed it back up using crude tools while screamed and bled into a hole in the dirt. I did not heal well. My whole vagina closed up, leaving a very tiny hole and extensive scarring. When I was around 15, I started menstruating and began clogging up each month because the blood could not release properly. My aunt took me back to the old woman where once again I was stripped of my clothes and laid over a hole in the dirt. Again, the old woman sliced my vagina with her crude tools. It was excruciating. It was misery.

After I got married, sex was extremely painful for me. When I went into labor with my son, my excision caused more pain and suffering for both me and my baby and my son has a permanent disability because of the complications my excision caused during his birth.

When my daughter was born, my husband insisted that she would also be excised. We fought about this all the time, and my husband became violent. He beat me on many occasions and told me that he was the man of the house and that it was his decision to make. He said he would look like a weak man to his family if he allowed me to tell him what to do. And he remained firm in his decision that my daughter would be subjected to excision as she grew older.

As the conflict between my husband and I continued, I got more involved in efforts opposing excision in my country. I worked on a special committee of the government ministry office dedicated to helping bring an end to the practice. I also led community efforts against excision. At my children’s schools, I provided detailed reports and graphic images and videos that the teachers could use in their lessons about excision, and I tried to teach anyone who would listen about the dangers and harms of the practice.

My husband and I eventually separated because of our conflict over our daughter’s excision. At first, he left the house and I was left alone to care for our children. He did not give me any support or help with the children and he would come to the house and threaten me. Then a few years later, he came and took my daughter. I truly believed that he would hold onto her just long enough to subject her to excision, and then he would let her come back to me. He did not actually want to take care of her, he just wanted to show me and his family that he is the man in charge and exert his power over me and my daughter.

No one in my country would help me protect my daughter. I went to the government, to the courts, to my family and my husband’s family but no one would intervene to help us. In my country, the man is in charge and has all the rights and I as a mother had no power. I came to the United States out of desperation, hoping someone could help me protect my daughter.

I was granted asylum based on the female genital mutilation I suffered, which was done to me because I am a woman from Burkina Faso. Thankfully, I was able to bring my daughter to safety here before her

father was able to subject her to this traumatizing, painful, useless practice. I refused with all my heart and soul to let this happen to my daughter and thankfully she is safe now. She is attending school and I am working as a security guard at a hospital to support her. I am very thankful that I am now a lawful permanent resident and that I am together with my daughter where I can raise her without fear. I support any efforts to oppose female excision, and to keep asylum protections for women and children like me and my daughter.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 20:

Anonymous

I came to the United States alone when I was 17 years old to escape extreme violence in my home in El Salvador. Both my mother and father were extremely abusive to me and my siblings throughout our childhoods. They knew they could get away with treating us however they wanted because they were our parents and treated us as their property. They knew they would never get in trouble because there were no police around our village and even if there were, they wouldn't help protect us.

From the time I was eight years old I had to work and my mother would take any money I earned and spend it on alcohol. She would beat me and my siblings regularly, with her hands, horsewhips, rocks, or any other objects she could find. She also tried to sell me to men so they would give her money or alcohol. My father was also extremely physically abusive. As I grew older, he also started to touch me inappropriately. He sexually abused my older sister and my niece, so I was very afraid he would do the same to me. When I was about 16, I tried to escape and go live in a city with my cousin, but it was overrun by gangs and I was terrified of being raped or harmed if I even left my cousin's apartment, so I decided I could only be safe if I fled to the United States. I made the difficult and dangerous journey here alone, hoping I would find safety. After I came to the United States, I continued to hear of my parents' worsening violence against my siblings.

It took over six years, but thankfully I was finally granted asylum. Later, I became a lawful permanent resident and I am now applying to be a U.S. citizen. I am married and was thankfully able to help my husband become a lawful permanent resident as well. He also came to the United States as a teen and has worked so hard all his life. He is now the lead worker on the large ranch where we live. Right now, I stay home to take care of our two beautiful daughters. But once they are both in school, I'd like to get a part-time job to be able to take advantage of the fact that I am allowed to work legally in the United States. As a young, poor, abused child, I could never have dreamed of the life I have now far away from the nightmare of my parents' abuse. There are many other children suffering the way I did, and I believe they also deserve a chance to apply for asylum and to have a life of safety, security, and happiness in the United States.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 21:

Anonymous

I am a 35-year-old man from Mexico, and I was granted asylum in June of 2019 based on my mental health. I was born and grew up in a small town in Mexico, when I was about four or five years old, I suffered a fall and almost drowned, as a result my brain suffered damage and I have had mental health problems since then. I have been diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia and neurodevelopmental disorder, because of that I tend to have erratic behavior and impaired cognition. I migrated to the United States at the age of 19 to live with my sister and her family in Colorado, where I've resided ever since. I came to the United States primarily so my sister could take care of me but also following the American dream to build a better life. Even though there are more opportunities in this country, the fact that I didn't have immigration status created obstacles for me to receive medical and mental health care and it was difficult to find a job. I was always fearful of the police and I had a constant fear of being deported.

Due to my mental illness, I ended up being arrested and was incarcerated in county jail and in a mental health institute for four years, I later ended up in immigration detention. When I was taken to immigration custody, I was so uneducated in the process and my rights that I thought I was going to be deported to a country that I no longer knew, a country where I knew I would be in danger because of all the violence, where I knew I would not be able to receive mental health care to improve my health. I thought I would be deported to the small town in Mexico where I would have to live with a distant relative and be in constant worry for my life and my health. There would have been no opportunities to find a job and I would not be able to build a better life.

I tried to fight my immigration case on my own but it was very hard to understand what was going on. I have problems understanding and I would hear so many people in my dorm who said that they weren't passing their interviews or winning their cases that I thought there was no hope from me. I was very surprised when I learned that I would be allowed to apply for asylum and even more surprised and grateful when I learned that I was going to get an attorney. With my attorney's help I won asylum, she helped me understand what was happening in my case she was my voice and helped me tell the judge my story, I couldn't have done it without her.

The day I won I couldn't believe it; I was in shock and so happy. It was a great feeling to learn that I would not be deported and it relieved so much pressure off my shoulders and my family's. I am very thankful that I was able to be successful in my case, I now live in peace, happily with my father, my sister and her family. I am receiving the treatment for my mental and medical health and take the medication I need; my mental health has improved because of that. My dream is to soon get my green card, find a good stable job doing landscaping, which I really enjoy, and one day be able to buy my own home. I am very thankful for all that I have specially with all the changes that are happening. Everyone should be given the opportunity to fight their case and feel safe.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 22:
Anonymous

I am a 37-year-old refugee from Somalia. In May 2020 I was granted deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture. In 2008 I arrived in the US as a refugee. I was fleeing persecution and genocide and running for my life. You see, I am a member of the Midgan clan, a minority group in Somalia. In Somalia there are four majority clans that run the show. They do whatever they want. In the past they killed some of my family members and injured me.

Here in the United States I feel safer because I do not worry about being kidnapped, jailed, held hostage, or killed, like I would be in Somalia. In 2014 I was unjustly convicted of a crime that put me into immigration proceedings. I have been detained and fighting my case from immigration detention for about a year now. I have had some very dark moments while being in detention. Before my final hearing I was feeling stressed and hopeless and depressed. I was having panic attacks; hallucinations and I wasn't sleeping. I was so scared I was going to be deported back to Somalia. I knew that if I was sent back, I would be killed. I would be killed because I am a minority and I suffer from visible mental health problems. There I am not considered a citizen. I have also been gone for many years, so I no longer speak proper Somali. This in addition to my mental health would make me an easy and visible target. I have known other Somalians deported from here and they were decapitated and killed.

I did not believe that I would be granted any type of relief. To be honest if I had been denied all relief and scheduled for deportation, I think I would have killed myself. While I was waiting for my decision, I was not feeling ok. Like I said, I was having hallucinations and suffering from extreme depression. I felt that committing suicide would be better than the fate that awaited me back in Somalia where I would have been beaten, tortured and brutally killed.

When my attorney called and explained that I had been granted deferral of removal under CAT, I felt a flood of relief, like huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders. It was a special day when my attorney told me I wouldn't be deported. It meant the world to me to know that he had fought for me and that the judge believed me. They saved my life.

I am still in detention and a part of me still believes they will try to deport me. I am still very nervous. But I feel better knowing people believe in me and are willing to fight for me. I would be shocked if I got released from detention, but if I do, the first thing I would like to do is find a way to get my life together. I would also like to tell the media all about my legal team and how they saved me. They are my heroes, and everyone should know how amazing they are. I am thrilled that the Judge took a chance on me and granted me this decision. I would also like to go to Olive Garden if I am released.

The United States is the only place that I can call home, it is the only place where I feel safe and it is where I have family. Well, I'm not too sure what the definition of family is. But here I have aunts and uncles and friends. I have people who will take care of me, and I am allowed to be alive. In Somalia I have no one. Everyone I had there has either left or been killed. I believe this system and the decision the judge gave me saved my life.

Asylum, withholding of removal, and the Convention Against Torture are necessary protections. They are lifesaving protections. They save people who would otherwise be killed if they were deported.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 23:

Anonymous

I am a 20-year-old from Mexico. In April 2020, I was granted asylum.

At the age of approximately seven years old, I was approached by people who offered me a job. I went through a lot of physical and psychological violence when I was a child at the hands of my parents and other family members. It led me to find safety in the streets, and I began sleeping under bridges. In order to survive, I accepted the offer. I went through a lot of struggles as a child. The Cartel began threatening me with death at around the age of 13. They tortured me and forced me to work for them. The Cartel told me they would kill me if I ever refused their orders. At that age, I did not think I had any other option. I had no one to turn to for help. I do not trust the government of Mexico, the police or the military. In Mexico, you never know who is working for the Cartel. Here in the U.S. it is different.

I never thought that I would be able to come to the U.S. I did not know of the protection of asylum in the U.S. until U.S. Border Patrol detained me. I was being forced to work for the Cartel one day and Patrol officers found me near the border. I thought I would have to return to Mexico but I was placed in foster home with a family instead.

My mind was blank during my hearing in front of the judge. When I found out I won, I felt so happy. I do not believe I would have won my case without an attorney by my side. I felt nervous but mostly calm and safe since I had an attorney that was fighting for me. I know would be killed or forced to work with the Cartel again if I did not win my case.

Asylum is necessary because it helps people like me to feel safe from harm. I wanted a second chance at life. I wanted to show the judge the good in me. I am now free. I can start fresh. I can live a life free from any threats to my life.

Since I won my asylum, I went on vacation with my new family. Now I am social distancing at home, watching television and playing x-box at home with my new family. I have dreams of getting my GED and finding a job. I want to buy a house and start a family here in the U.S. I want to help others too. I want to help kids in foster care and groups homes. I want them to know that they are not alone and they can make good decisions too.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 24:

Anonymous

I am 37 years of age from Cameroon and I won asylum in April 2020.

I fled Cameroon after being beaten and detained by military officials due to my political opinion and support of the Anglophone movement. While in Cameroon I was arrested multiple times and suffered beatings with rifle on my forehead and threats of being shot at by the Cameroonian military, due to my participation in peaceful protests in support of the Anglophones. If I were sent back to Cameroon, I would face imprisonment and death by the Cameroonian military and accused of supporting the independence of southern Cameroon.

My family was in danger back home to the point that my wife was killed when she was leaving to go to another city that the military separatist fighters were in. It is therefore that I am afraid of the Cameroonian government, specifically the military.

In order to get to this point I had to go through the credible fear process multiple times. Even though I was bond eligible I decided to not take that option and continued in GEO detention while waiting for a period of time for my asylum claim. Waiting and winning asylum has made me the happiest person on earth because I finally felt safe and protected in the United States. I am very grateful for being granted such decision.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 25:

Anonymous

I am a 31-year-old man from Eritrea, and I was granted deferral of removal Under the Convention Against Torture in May 2020.

I was born in the city of Asmara, which is in what is now Eritrea. But when I was born, Asmara was in Ethiopia. That part of Ethiopia became Eritrea in 1991. My father is a member of the Eritrean Bilen tribe and my mother is Ethiopian Tigrinya. When I was young, my mother was mistreated a lot and detained multiple times by the Eritrean government due to her nationality. She eventually fled from Eritrea because of this abuse. There was a war around that time that made things very hard for Ethiopians.

I remember being beaten by a teacher when I was a child because my parents were from different nationalities. When I was in about fourth grade, the Eritrean national anthem began to play, and a classmate laughed. I was the only half-Ethiopian student in the class, and the teacher accused me of being the person who laughed. Even though I told the teacher it wasn't me, the teacher told me to kneel on the ground and beat me up.

My father was no good. He physically abused me many times. He would beat me with belts and sticks to punish me. I spent a lot of time in the streets growing up, to avoid my father and to make money. I sold cigarettes, gum, tissues, and other things. The Eritrean officials thought of me as a "street kid" and locked me up overnight several times. One time, they detained me for playing dice. They had me lie down on the floor and hit me with cables on my arms, back, and legs.

When I was about 15, the Eritrean government tried to force me to join the military. The military police stopped me when I was walking and didn't have my student ID with me. They put me in a vehicle to take me to military headquarters. When we came to a traffic stop, I jumped out and started to run away. I heard an official fire two shots and saw that other people in the vehicle were also trying to run away. Military officers caught me and detained me for about a week. While I was detained, they beat the bottom of my feet with a cow tail and really hurt me. I couldn't walk for several days. After about a week, they took me to a hospital. A doctor looked at my teeth to figure out my age. I think they realized I was underage, so they released me.

In 2005, I was out selling cigarettes. Someone came up to me, put two cigarettes in a pack I had and told me he would be back later to buy that same pack. He did come back later. He bought the pack and gave me a big tip. I saw him give a cigarette from the pack to an Eritrean Ministry official. The next morning, I heard on the news that that official had died in the night. I was really scared that the cigarette had been tampered with and that the official died from smoking it. I was afraid I would be detained and killed for participating, without knowing it, in the official's death. So, I decided that I had to flee from Eritrea.

About a month later, I crossed the Eritrean/Ethiopian border. Ethiopian soldiers asked me for my documents and sent me to a refugee camp. When I was processed at the camp, I handed over my student ID card. It was the only identification I had, and they never gave it back to me. While I was in the refugee camp, Ethiopian officials questioned me about the death of the Eritrean official, and a member of an Ethiopian intelligence agency also talked to me about it. Someone at the camp who I had never talked to about the incident told me, "you could have stopped it," and I felt really threatened.

Also while I was in the refugee camp, a worker with the United Nations sexually abused me. I identify as homosexual, and because of that, two men at the camp beat me with a stick. During my time in the camp, I went to meetings of the Eritrean Youth Solidarity for National Salvation. I accepted the Baha'i faith and am still a member of it.

I was admitted to the United States as a refugee in 2009 and got my green card in 2011. While in the U.S., I've worked as a wheelchair attendant at the airport, doing painting, doing carpentry, and working in hotels. Over the years, I've been homeless at times and have had a hard time with substance use. I was diagnosed with PTSD and bipolar disorder and take medication for them now. I haven't had any contact with my family in years and don't know where they are.

In May 2019, I was put in deportation proceedings. I was very happy when I won protection under the Convention Against Torture. It was very important for me to be able to stay in the U.S. because in Eritrea and Ethiopia you will be arrested and killed for being homosexual. I cannot go back to Eritrea or Ethiopia. The judge in my case said there are lots of reasons I might be tortured if I went back to Eritrea, since I had already been detained lots of times there and was beaten when I was detained by the government, because I'm a member of the Baha'i faith, because I escaped from being forced into military service, because my parents are from different nationalities, and because I'm homosexual, and the Eritrean government might torture me for any of those reasons. There is no place in Eritrea I could be safe because of the way the government monitors people.

To me, having protection in the United States means having another life. I don't know too much about the Geneva law, but I know people can't be deported to places where they will be tortured. The United States is very proud of protecting human rights, so it is not a good thing to try to change that. The United States needs to continue protecting human rights.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 26:
Anonymous

I am a 19 year-old woman and asylee from Cuba. I fled my country because of harm that I and my family suffered because of our opposition to the political system in Cuba. I was targeted because I attended protests to express my political opinions. I was arrested and falsely charged. They threatened that if I did not sign and agree to the charges, that I would not be let out of prison. Luckily, I had a personal connection to a police officer who let me go. I knew that if I was arrested again, I may not be so lucky.

It has been marvelous to have asylum in the United States. It has changed my life. I don't even know what would have happened if the circumstances had been different here and if I had been returned to my country. I think I would be either imprisoned or dead.

Being able to seek asylum here in the US was the only option I had. I cannot return to my country. It is not an option. One of the proposed rule changes is to increase the possibility that someone will be relocated to a different place inside the same country they are fleeing. In my case, this would not have been possible, and I would have suffered the same things at any place in the country.

My family and I were persecuted because of our political opinion. Some of the other rules that may be changed would have impacted how the US government perceived our political opinion. It is scary to think that I may not have won my case if the rules were changed.

It is something very hard for me to hear...for the government to try and make it more difficult to request asylum. The people have a right to be here to ask for asylum - what else are the people supposed to do if they cannot go back to their home country?

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 27:

Anonymous

I am a 21 year old man from Honduras and I won my asylum case in July of 2019.

When I was a child I was regularly abused sexually and physically by older family members because they thought that I was gay. I was beaten in school regularly and my classmates would call me names like “faggot” and “little girl.” My teacher knew and didn’t do anything. I eventually had to switch schools but the harassment just continued. My neighborhood in Honduras was very dangerous and was controlled by MS-13. One day I wore a pink shirt when I was walking on my way to school and I was attacked by MS-13 members who threatened me and stole my backpack which had my telephone and identification.

I suffered a lot in Honduras, I endured such terrible violence that no one should have to endure because of my sexual orientation. I was afraid that I could not survive there. There were no laws there to protect me and the laws there weren’t respected, everything was corrupt. I was afraid for my life and I decided to come to the United States to seek asylum so that I could have a future.

Having asylum has changed my life in every aspect. I have the right to be the person that I am and I try to help others. I was able to get a social security card and a job. I am so happy to have transformed my life here and to live without fear of anything because it is calm and safe for me here. My dreams are to be with my family, to have my own construction company, to move ahead in life, and to be happy.

The change to the law that would allow a judge to dismiss an asylum application without having a hearing is unfair. When I was in detention I had to rely on another detained person to help me fill out my asylum application because I did not read or write in English. I was afraid to tell him about the details of my past because I didn’t want people in my dorm to find out that I was gay and to attack me. I was uncomfortable having my application filled out and it wasn’t filled out well because I was too afraid to put all the details. There were other people from my country in my dorm and I knew how people who are gay are treated in Honduras. I was depressed when I was in detention but when I had the opportunity to have my hearing before a judge I felt calm and I had hope. A hearing before a judge is something that should not be denied to anyone. It is necessary for people to have hearings so that judges can understand their whole story.

It is unfair to change the law to make it more difficult for people to pass their credible fear interviews. My interview was the first time that I had ever talked about all the things I had experienced. It was very difficult for me because these are things that hurt so much to talk about. I remember other people in detention who were sent back to their countries because they had too hard of a time talking about their past. Trauma affects our abilities to tell our stories, especially for the first time.

The changes that the government is trying to make to the law is unjust because people have suffered so much but will be sent back to their countries without an opportunity to be protected. I am grateful that I had an opportunity to change my life here and to have hope. It is something that is to unfair to change the laws that provide protection that people need. People are coming to the United States fleeing from all of the problems that they have and everyone deserves the same opportunity that I had. I am a very happy person, my life has totally changed because I won asylum, I can be happy and have the opportunity to do my part to share my story with you because it is unjust to make these changes because everyone deserves opportunity in their life – we are all human, and everyone deserves to be listened to and to receive help.

July 15, 2020

Testimonial 28:

Anonymous

Mr. N is a 28-year-old asylee, originally from Pakistan. His wife and children reside in Pakistan and he is in the process of bringing them to the United States where they can be reunited and live safely. Mr. N is represented by pro bono counsel who helped him win his asylum case before the Denver Immigration Court in January 2020.

Mr. N and his family members identify as Christian. Mr. N. does not speak English. His primary language is Punjabi of Pakistan. Mr. N's family suffered physical violence and threats on account of their religious identity.

In 2016, Mr. N and his Christian friends were approached by a large group of Muslim men armed with guns, metal rods, and hockey sticks. They were accused of being spies for a Christian nation, the United States and they were told they must convert from Christianity. These armed men attacked him and his friends and Mr. N suffered serious head injuries as a result of being hit in the head with a metal rod. He still suffers from headaches and unexplainable fevers. Following the incident, Mr. N was also charged with blasphemy by the Lashkar-e-Taiba organization.

Following this incident, Mr. N decided to move his family into hiding and they remained in hiding from July 2016 until Mr. N fled to Brazil with his colleagues in December 2016. Due to ongoing fears surrounding their safety in Brazil, the three fathers fled to the United States on foot.

Mr. N entered the United States for the first time in July 2018. He entered without inspection and approached a border patrol agent to ask for help. Mr. N was detained for several months and after expressing a fear of returning to Pakistan, he was given a credible fear interview. Mr. N was found to have a credible fear of return. In November 2018, he was released from detention on bond and successfully pursued his asylum claim before the Denver Immigration Court with the help of his pro bono attorney.

His attorney shared the following quote "this win undoubtedly saved his life and the lives of his wife and children. He is able to live freely and without fear. Asylum has made the pursuit of his dreams possible."