

SCHOOL TO DEPORTATION TESTIMONY (Naroen):

- My name is Naroen Chhin. I am a community organizer with 1Love movement, I chair the board of the Philadelphia Northwest Neighborhood Advisory Committee on top of my full time job. I am also a refugee from Cambodia and I have a felony conviction. I am a US citizen, and I did not have to face the consequence of deportation, but I have supported my friends and their families and other community members as they have gone through the deportation process.
- As refugees, we experience the consequences of ICE holds every single day. Our organization, 1Love Movement, started because there was a deportation crisis in our community in 2010. Several members of our community who came to the US as refugees were rounded up by deportation agents because of offenses that they committed when they were teenagers. They had already served their time, left prison and reformed themselves. They were giving back to the community, they had built families, bought homes and started businesses, and all of that was taken away from them. We witnessed the ability of our friends and family members to turn their lives around, but even though they had transformed themselves, they were still subjected to a second level of punishment for mistakes they made in the past when deportation became involved.
- I want to give you some context about what we experienced in our community growing up. When my community was resettled here from Cambodia, we were living in extremely poor neighborhoods where day to day the only thing we saw was drugs, gangs and racial conflict. Our parents were still assimilating and adjusting to American culture and facing their own trauma of having survived a genocide, and they didn't know how to support us as we were going through the school system. This city was not prepared for refugee resettlement and to help us apply for the benefits we needed. Even basic things like health care and transportation were a huge barrier to us. Everywhere we went, we were harassed and bullied for being different, and there was no where for us to go for support.
- Gangs started because kids wanted to protect themselves and they were being abandoned by their schools. I remember my uncle walking me and his kids to school, and he himself was attacked and knocked out. No one acknowledged what was happening to us. Once gangs started, kids starting using drugs. The focus of the community shifted from taking care of each other, to attacking each other and even killing each other. This is how members of our community started getting arrested. Because of the gang involvement, my friends ended up being charged with adult crimes even though they were teenagers. Because they were not citizens, they were given a double punishment when they left prison and then had to face deportation.
- Why did I get to stay and my friends do not? Why are they treated differently? Where is the second chance in that? Where is their opportunity to turn their lives around? This is why I do this work.
- For my community, we came here as refugees to escape persecution and to look for a safe home, like the people who colonized this area did hundreds of years ago. We came here for a second chance. People leaving prison deserve that second chance.

- This is why I am here to ask the Mayor to adopt an order putting an end to all ICE holds in Philadelphia. Thank you for your time.