

# Lives in the Balance:

## Dreamers and TPS Holders Share Their Stories





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**“WE DON’T WANT  
TO LIVE IN FEAR AND  
WORRY THAT OUR  
FAMILIES WILL BE  
SEPARATED.”**

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# What is Temporary Protected Status?<sup>1</sup>

Immigrant communities throughout the United States are increasingly concerned about their future in this country. Among those living in fear are holders of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The Trump Administration has repeatedly attempted to revoke the TPS program and has been temporarily halted by national lawsuits. **The terminations, if allowed to proceed, would affect 98% of people offered protections under TPS.**

TPS is a provisional designation granted to immigrants in the U.S. who can't return to their home countries due to armed conflict, natural disasters, epidemics, or other extraordinary conditions. Since the early 1990s, TPS has allowed holders to legally work on a temporary basis. And thanks to multiple extensions, many have been in the United States for decades. TPS currently does not allow a person to become a permanent resident, naturalize as a U.S. citizen, or receive public benefits.

In the United States today, there are approximately 320,000 people with TPS from 10 countries—South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Syria, Haiti, Nepal, and Yemen. The majority are from El Salvador (195,000), Honduras (57,000), and Haiti (46,000).<sup>2</sup>

In the past, some TPS holders have “graduated out” of their status, because the adverse conditions in their home country improved. However, when conditions in

a home country fail to improve sufficiently after a prolonged period, it becomes highly unlikely that that country will be able to absorb returning nationals. With that in mind, **Congress should provide permanent immigration status to people who have lived in the United States for a significant period of time.**

Some TPS beneficiaries have lived in the U.S. for almost two decades. A recent study suggests that 80.3% of TPS holders from Central America pay taxes, including 79.3% of people who are self-employed. In that study, the average TPS holder contributed funds to social security for 15.4 years.<sup>3</sup> **To designate peaceful, productive, tax-paying residents of the United States as “no longer welcome here” is unjust and unnecessary.** It's also expensive. A case study suggests that deportation of 300,000 TPS holders from El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti would **cost the U.S. government over \$3 billion; moreover, deportation of all TPS holders would lead to a \$45.2 billion reduction in gross domestic product over a decade.**<sup>4</sup>

Keeping people with TPS in our country is good for our economy and in our national interest. As productive members of our society, they should be eligible for a path to residency and citizenship. These people have worked hard, have not imposed a burden on American taxpayers, have passed regular background checks, and are law-abiding community members.

1 Information drawn from a December 13, 2018 letter written by Nydia M. Velázquez, Member of Congress, Dear Colleague on American Promise Act Reintroduction: Seeking Cosponsors for 116 Congress

2 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-protections/immigrants-in-u-s-seeking-safe-haven-may-send-them-back-idUSKBN1CB2RN>

3 [http://ipsr.ku.edu/migration/pdf/TPS\\_Report.pdf](http://ipsr.ku.edu/migration/pdf/TPS_Report.pdf)

4 Economic contributions by Salvadoran, Honduran, and Haitian TPS holders: The Cost to Taxpayers, GDP, and Businesses of Ending TPS (ILRC, 2017): [https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017-04-18\\_economic\\_contributions\\_by\\_salvadoran\\_honduran\\_and\\_haitian\\_tps\\_holders.pdf](https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017-04-18_economic_contributions_by_salvadoran_honduran_and_haitian_tps_holders.pdf)



# A U R O R A

**“Please don’t  
deport my dad.  
Don’t take TPS  
away.”**

**We need to find ways to protect my  
dad and the hundreds of thousands  
of other TPS holders so that families  
like mine will not be torn apart.”**

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I'm 17 years old and am a senior in High School. I was born in Berkeley and have lived in the East Bay my whole life. My dad has Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The Trump administration has cancelled TPS for over 400,000 people, including 57,000 people from Honduras. If we don't create a legislative solution for TPS holders, my dad could be deported by January 2020.

My parents are originally from Honduras. My dad came first and got settled in 1999 before I was born. Then my mom came later in 2000. They both wanted to raise a family and make sure that their kids had access to a good education and could live free of violence.

I'm the oldest of four children. My oldest brother is about to turn 13. He loves my dad and works with him every Saturday. The youngest boy is 9 and my little sister is 7. We are all U.S. citizens.

My dad got Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 1999. TPS was created for Hondurans after a devastating hurricane in Honduras. TPS allowed my dad to get a work permit and stay in the U.S. legally since it wasn't safe to return to Honduras. With TPS and a work permit, my dad got a job working at a metal and roofing company; 19 years later, he is still at the same company. He has proven himself to be a really good worker and has been promoted three times. He is now a supervisor.

TPS allowed my dad to have a stable income, stay in the U.S., and support his family. My dad has lived here for almost twenty years, paying taxes, sending his kids to school, and buying our own home. He works a lot and often goes to side jobs on the weekends. He loves fishing with his brothers and his kids.

**I'm very proud of my family and feel very grateful for how far we've come. My parents have worked really hard to get us to where we are today.**

As a senior in high school, I'm in a special program at community college to gain skills in the medical field. My dream is to go into neonatal nursing and help premature babies. After community college, I plan to transfer to a 4-year college for my degree. I am grateful to the U.S. for the education that I have been able to receive. I was able to get a job at age 16. My family is all together and we feel safe and connected.

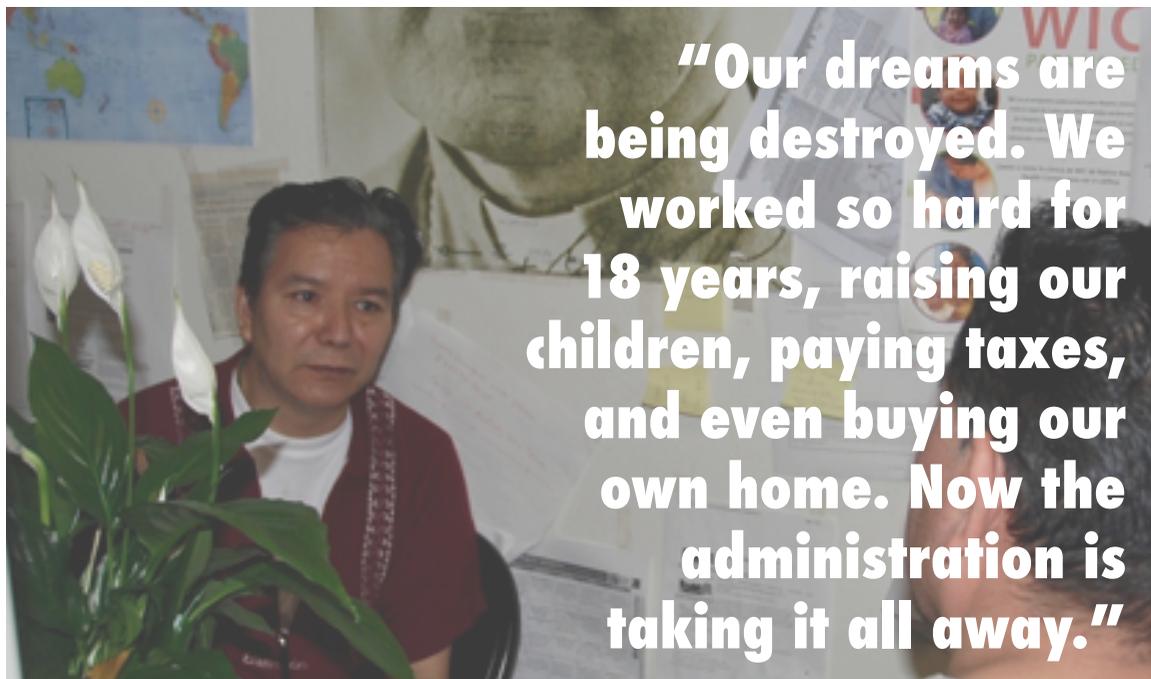
There is no reason to kick my dad out of the U.S. He has been here for 20 years and done everything right. I feel sad, mad, and frustrated at the thought that my father could be deported at any moment when he has done nothing wrong.

**As you may know, the conditions in Honduras are still very dangerous. Honduras is a place people are trying to flee due to gang violence. From what I know, it's dangerous to even walk around the streets. My dad is afraid to go back – as an outsider who has lived in the U.S. for almost twenty years, he could be targeted for violence or extortion.**

If my dad is deported, it would be devastating to our family and community. We are all really close. I don't know what we would do without him. Besides our emotional bond, he is the main breadwinner in our family. We would probably lose our house and wouldn't be able to continue our education. I wouldn't know what to do or how to survive without him.

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# GABRIEL AND CECILIA



We grew up during the civil wars in El Salvador in the 1970s. As children, we couldn't play outside. We would often see dead bodies in the streets and lived in a continuous state of trauma. The peace accords eventually came, but then things got even worse. During the war, many fighters had fled to the U.S. Some ended up in Los Angeles, where they learned about the U.S. style of gangs. When they were deported back to El Salvador in the early 1990s, they brought the "Maras" gang mentality and organization with them. The gangs found fertile conditions; the army had been trained by the U.S. in how to control and terrorize the people and use weapons. The El Salvador government was in shambles. The gangs grew and grew.

We fled El Salvador in 2000 with our 2-year old son, "Juan," and we all received TPS in 2001, after the earthquakes. Juan is now 20 years old and studying business and music at a community college. Our younger son, "Toby," is eight years old and is a U.S. citizen. Both our sons have gone to East Bay schools for their whole lives.

When we first arrived, we had nothing. TPS allowed us to receive work permits. We started to work three jobs at a time. Gabriel worked in hotels as a banquet server, and Cecilia worked at department stores. We worked all the time, but felt like the sacrifices were worth it. We saved and bought a small house in 2002, but we lost it in the housing crash. We continued to work and bought another house in 2012, where we still live.

*If we are deported back to El Salvador, we fear for our lives. The gangs still control the neighborhoods, and we're afraid that they will conscript our sons. The police have been infested by the gangs; if you make a police report, the next day, you are dead. If you say something wrong or refuse to pay the gangs extortion money, you are killed.*

*We can't sleep at night. We will lose our home, our safety, and all we have worked so hard to achieve in the U.S. We will be forced to go to a dangerous country to start over, with no place to live. Our whole family will be under constant threat.*

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## **The main messages that we want to share:**

- The President says he wants to deport gang members and criminals. We are neither. We are humble people who work hard and have been raising our children in the U.S. for almost twenty years.
- El Salvador is a small country that is not able to fight organized crime on its own. Would you send your children into a country infested by these gangs? That's what you're doing to us.
- El Salvador and the other TPS countries have many problems and dangers and are not prepared to receive TPS families.

# MARISOL AND FAMILY

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In 1999, Marisol was a young mother living in El Salvador. She was unable to feed her two young daughters and her family faced extortion and threats on a regular basis. Not knowing if she'd ever see her daughters again, she decided to travel to the U.S.

**“There was so much violence,” she explains. “I was desperate to create a better life for my girls.”**

On the journey, she feared she might die. “My daughters were my inspiration to keep going.” After twenty-eight days, she reached her brother in Oakland. Soon after, she received a work permit through TPS and was able to find work and send money back to her daughters in El Salvador.

Marisol’s husband initially stayed behind with the children, but eventually the entire family, including Marisol’s parents, was forced to flee. The girls were ten and nine years old when they made the harrowing trip, separately and alone. By then both their parents were in Oakland. After terrifying journeys, they were reunited with their parents and finally able to meet their four-year-old brother.

In 2012, the girls were approved for the DACA program. Before DACA, the young women worried constantly about being deported. “We were scared to be without our parents, afraid to go outside, and afraid of raids,” Ana says.

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In 2016, Ana enrolled in community college, and she was recently hired as a medical assistant, a job she loves. She dreams of becoming a nurse and buying her mother a house. Without DACA, she knows she wouldn't have been able to attend college or pursue her dreams. She worries about being forced to return to El Salvador. "I don't want to be apart from my family," she says. "El Salvador isn't safe. We can't access food, jobs, or education."

Her younger brother, a U.S. citizen, agrees. "Thanks to DACA and TPS, my sisters and parents are here. If DACA and TPS were cancelled, I would be alone. What would I do without my family?"

Marisol continues, "Please support a legal solution to keep my family together. Our lives will be in danger if we are forced to return to El Salvador. After being in the U.S. for eighteen years, the gangs will think I have a lot of money, and I'll be at extreme risk of extortion and personal violence, including sexual violence. I can't even think about my daughters being there after we've finally become safe. I am afraid of being separated from my children. My 16-year-old son is a U.S. citizen. I would never take him to El Salvador—it's an extremely violent place that is dangerous for young people—but I can't imagine leaving him here alone. I don't know what will happen. My dream is to stay together with my children. We all want to be together."

# GISELA

I am a 60-year-old Salvadoran and a TPS holder. I came to this country in 1991, right after the last guerilla offensive during the civil war. I feel very grateful to the United States government for allowing me to stay here legally for more than 18 years.

However, the emotional price that I have had to pay has been very high. I had no choice but to leave my three young children—my 5-year-old son and my two daughters, 9 and 12 years old—in order to survive. It took me 24 years before I could see them again. During those 24 years, I cried every single day, hoping one day to hug and kiss my children again. Several close relatives—my mother, oldest niece, and sister—passed away during that time, and I wasn't able to say goodbye. This was very disturbing and painful to me.

In the middle of all my losses, I attended college night classes and worked full-time. In May of 2013, I got my degree in Early Childhood Education with honors. Presently, I am a site supervisor in a preschool in Oakland, California.

In October 2015, my father had a massive heart attack. I obtained permission from the immigration authorities to go back to my country to see him. For the first time in 24 years, I was able to hug my children and my dad. Eight months later my father had a stroke, so in July of 2016 I was permitted to return to El Salvador to see my father, perhaps for the last time. My father is still alive, but his health has deteriorated.

What will happen if, as a result of the discontinuance of the TPS program, I am deported back to El Salvador? How will I find work in El Salvador when employers refuse to hire workers who are older than 36 years old?

I have been in the United States for 27 years, working and paying taxes even before I was able to obtain my work permit. I paid income tax and premiums for health insurance that I rarely use. My contributions to this country have been 100%. I have also supported my unemployed father and children.

Now that TPS holders are at risk of losing our work permits, my stress and anxiety have increased, and my health is deteriorating. Yet I must keep my sanity in order to perform at my job. TPS holders are productive, contributing members of this society and country, but without permanent legal status.

We have earned what we are asking for. Please look at us as people—not numbers—and give us the opportunity to become permanent residents.

**We are human beings who are desperate to get the peace of mind that we can only have if we are granted our legal status to live and contribute to this society.**

You have the power to help make this come true. Please do what is morally right. Please help us obtain our legal status here in the U.S.

# VANESSA AND ANTONIO

We arrived in the United States almost 20 years ago from El Salvador, fleeing violence, insecurity, and a lack of opportunities. We brought with us a bag full of dreams and all the energy of a young couple willing to work hard to fulfill those dreams. Shortly after we left, El Salvador was the epicenter of two major earthquakes that devastated almost every corner of the country. The United States government saw the desperate need of Salvadorans and in 2001 granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Salvadorans who were in the U.S. before the earthquakes.

We are forever thankful for this immigration relief, an act of compassion and solidarity that was given to us as a nation in need by the U.S. government during the George W. Bush administration and continued under Barack Obama. TPS was a blessing that helped us fully integrate into our community and the United States society and economy.

**We were able to achieve almost all our dreams during these 19 years. We bought a house and became parents of three beautiful children. We rejoiced when our eldest daughter graduated with honors, fluent in three languages, setting an example for her siblings. She was accepted into her dream school, the University of California-Berkeley, to pursue her own dreams as a first-generation American. We are proud to say that with our faith, hard work, and the opportunity that was given to us through TPS, we were able to achieve the American Dream.**

Now that the current administration has canceled TPS, everything that we achieved is on shaky ground. We are having trouble believing that after almost 20 years of contributing to the economy, building a life, and becoming part of this great nation, we are not welcome anymore. The administration seems to think it is easy to pack 20 years of your life into a suitcase and leave. It feels cruel to terminate the TPS program without any remorse or analysis of the consequences, and without looking for alternative solutions for us to remain legally in the U.S.

By terminating TPS, the administration is taking away the rights of our children to be with their parents. It is harsh and unfair to force children to choose between their safety, economic stability, and dreams and their ability to be with their parents at an age where they are fully dependent on us. As is happening in many TPS households, our children are starting to show the signs of stress, desperation, and uncertainty over this agonizing situation. They can't stop thinking about the day when their lives will be shattered.

We ask the U.S. Senate and Congress to act to protect their own citizens—our children—from this cruelty, and to pass a legislative solution that brings relief to our families and gives us the opportunity to be a part of this nation, as we have been for the past 20 years. We ask this administration to reconsider their decision to eliminate TPS and avoid the crisis that will force the separation of American children from their parents. Almost a quarter million American children will face separation if nothing is done to save TPS. Over the last 20 years, we have demonstrated that we are integral members of the United States economy and society. Please do not separate our families.

**Please give us the  
opportunity to continue  
to help grow this nation.**

# JACQUELINE

I am 39 years old. I left El Salvador at the age of 21. In El Salvador, I had been living with my grandmother since I was little, but she got sick, and I couldn't survive or live on my own. The gangs would roam the neighborhood at night and attack different houses. I was afraid. My mother was already living in the U.S.; she had TPS since 1990 and later received her green card. I decided to go live with her in San Francisco.

I received TPS in 2001, when there was a 7.5-magnitude earthquake in El Salvador. I was very happy to be able to get a work permit in the U.S. I started working in a hotel and then in a large bakery. Now I am working as an office janitor in San Francisco; it's a good position with medical insurance and paid vacation. I now live independently in my own apartment, and my mother lives nearby.

I've been living in the U.S. and paying taxes for 18 years. If TPS is cancelled, I would have nowhere to go in El Salvador. I don't have any relatives there or an apartment where I could live.

**I am afraid to go back to El Salvador. The gangs are very powerful throughout the country. If I returned, I would be the target of extortion or violence like my aunt, who fled last year.** The government is not able to protect people; this is why so many are escaping and seeking asylum.

The current situation around TPS has made me very anxious. As a TPS holder, I am very grateful to the U.S. for the chance to have safety, be with my mother, and work legally. After 18 years, I have created a good life and am an active member of my church and community.

TPS holders like me have been here for almost twenty years. We have been working hard, contributing to the U.S. economy, and have never received any welfare. What is the point of sending us away from our homes and families into dangerous and unstable conditions?

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**“Please support a path to permanent residency for me and the 320,000 other TPS holders. Our lives depend on it.”**

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# ROBERTO AND FAMILY

I have had Temporary Protected Status (TPS) since 2001. I currently live in Sunnyvale, California and have two jobs in the hotel industry.

My wife and I have two beautiful children who are U.S. citizens: a 19-year-old daughter who studies nursing at community college and a 15-year-old son who attends high school. My family is the reason why I get up every day.

**“Thanks to the TPS program, I am economically stable and am an active member of my community. TPS allowed me to become rooted into U.S. society; with a driver’s license and a work permit, I have been able to fulfill the role of good citizen.”**

Whenever I renew my TPS permit (every 18 months), I go through a criminal background check by the FBI. If any TPS holder commits a felony, they are automatically kicked out of the program. I'm very proud to say that I have passed my background check every single time, without any problems at all.

We TPS recipients work very hard. We pay our taxes, bills, mortgages, and school tuition as we contribute to the economy of this great nation. The termination of TPS has caused a lot of confusion, anxiety, fear, and concern for the safety of our families.

**If I am deported, my children would be separated from their father, and my family would lose the financial support that I provide by working two jobs.**

All TPS families are affected by this decision to cancel TPS and the tormenting possibility of being separated from our children. Please advocate for my family and for all families with TPS by helping us to get on a path for legalization for TPS and DACA recipients.

As Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi stated in her letter on January 8, 2018, **"Congress now has a moral duty to provide permanent security for the patriotic, hard-working Salvadorans who contribute to our nation in every way before the deadline expires."**

We TPS holders are here to work collaboratively with you to make this happen. Thank you.

# JOSEFINA AND FAMILY

**We were young when we fled El Salvador due to gang violence. They killed almost all of the young men on our block. We realized my husband needed to flee for his life.**

My husband and I have been in the USA for almost twenty years, working and paying taxes and raising our children.

When we first arrived, we had nothing and were very poor. We worked at odd jobs that didn't pay well. I was pregnant and afraid to go to the hospital because I thought they would deport me. We nearly became homeless, but a church offered us a room.

In 2001, we received TPS. I felt so happy that we could finally work without fear. My husband works for a delivery company and valet parking; my son, who is now 27 and also has TPS, works for a towing company. I make and sell pupusas after a stroke three years ago left me partially paralyzed. We have two U.S.-born children, ages 15 and 12, who have lived in the Bay Area their whole lives.

Since the administration announced it would cancel TPS, we have been very sad and afraid. The situation in El Salvador is still very dangerous, and we could be killed. It would be especially difficult for our children, who have only known life in the U.S. In El Salvador, you can't take your kids to the park or walk around freely because of the gangs. Even scarier, if a gang member wants to date your daughter, he will give you 24 hours to hand her over. If you say no, they will kill you. This happened to my cousin's daughter, and they escaped in the night.

**Please pass legislation to protect people with TPS. We are human beings, and we are working hard. We pay taxes and are not asking for welfare. We want to continue working for our children and for our community.**



# East Bay Sanctuary Covenant

Founded in 1982 and based in Berkeley, California, East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC) has served thousands of people with TPS and DACA.

[www.eastbaysanctuary.org](http://www.eastbaysanctuary.org)  
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