Written Statement of Asian Americans Advancing Justice

House Judiciary Committee

Hearing on “Protecting Dreamers and TPS Recipients”

March 6, 2019

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) is a national partnership of five non-profit, non-partisan organizations that work to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. We are based in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

We appreciate this opportunity to submit a statement for the record for today’s hearing on protecting Dreamers and TPS recipients. One and a half years ago, the administration announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, creating a crisis for the 800,000 young people in the program and many others who were or would have become eligible for relief. Of the 1.2 million immigrants who were eligible for DACA, over 120,000 were Asian.1 Furthermore, since 2017, the administration has announced the termination of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program for 98 percent of recipients, totaling over 400,000 individuals.2 With the administration’s decision last year to terminate TPS for Nepal, nearly 9,000 Nepalis face the risk of deportation when the current designation expires in June 2019.3 Furthermore, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities account for one out of every 20 TPS recipients in the United States, including 7,000 recipients from Syria4 and over 1,000 recipients from Yemen.5

While court injunctions have allowed renewals for DACA recipients and some TPS recipients, a permanent legislative solution is necessary to end the state of limbo in which over a million immigrants, all of whom arrived in the U.S. as children or were given safe haven from natural disasters or violent conflicts in their home countries, continue to live.

Dreamers and TPS recipients have been part of our communities for decades. With the DACA program, hundreds of thousands of Dreamers were able to attend college, become professionals, including teachers and doctors, and support their families and communities. TPS recipients were able to start businesses, become homeowners, and raise their children in the U.S. In fact, there is significant overlap between Dreamers and TPS recipients – 30 percent of TPS recipients are Dreamers who came to the U.S. as children, and many Dreamers have family members with TPS. As such, we call on Congress to provide permanent protection and a path to citizenship for both Dreamers and individuals with TPS.

The stories of Dreamers and TPS recipients illustrate how they are an integral part of our nation, working hard and contributing to their communities in pursuit of the American dream. Dreamers and TPS recipients are also part of the diverse social fabric of America – helping to build up our country into the culturally rich and vibrant nation that it is today. Marcela Zhou Huang was born and raised in a Mexican border town to Chinese immigrants, and she felt the weight of her undocumented status while living on the other side of the border in Calexico, California. In spite of her academic accomplishments and potential, she lacked basic forms of identification, such as a Social Security number, that rendered her invisible and limited her ability to contribute meaningfully to her community. Marcela eventually obtained DACA, which gave her “access to many luxuries: a driver’s license, a credit card, and most importantly, a relief from the constant fear and depression [she had experienced] for a long time.” In addition to bolstering her sense of security and confidence, her new status allowed her to pursue her dream of becoming a physician committed to “[improving] health conditions for the underserved” and, ultimately, to strengthen her community.

Similarly, TPS has transformed the lives of thousands of TPS recipients, allowing them to gain socioeconomic stability while continuing to contribute to our country. Bibek, a TPS recipient from Nepal, came to the United States in 2014, and when Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake the following year, he found himself unable to return home. As a TPS recipient, Bibek was able to secure a stable, good-paying job as a sushi chef in Manhattan, and support his wife and two young children back home as Nepal struggles to rebuild from the earthquake. Without TPS, Bibek fears that the “dreams and the life [he is] building towards will be gone” and that he will lose his home, health insurance, and means of supporting his family. He prays for a permanent solution that would allow him “to continue building a fruitful and productive life here in the U.S.”

Community members like Marcela and Bibek represent the cornerstone of American values and help our country thrive and advance. As members of families and of larger communities, Dreamers and TPS recipients have existed as part of the fabric of America for decades – ignoring how their contributions have enriched our society is both unwise and unjust. Therefore, we call upon our Members of Congress to show moral leadership and to do what the administration has failed to do. In order to preserve the promise of the American Dream, they must enact a permanent legislative solution that will place Dreamers and TPS recipients on a pathway to citizenship and protect them once and for all. Further, we urge Congress to pass clean legislation
– a legislative solution that does not attack our immigrant families. Adding additional immigration enforcement measures that put families at risk for detention or deportation will only further harm our Dreamers and TPS recipients.