

Testimony of Teresa Flores to the Philadelphia City Council Committee on Public Safety
March 12, 2014

My name is Teresa Flores and I am a member of the New Sanctuary Movement and the Visitation Church. I lived in NY for 18 years and then we moved to Philadelphia in 2007 with my husband and my two children, who were 22 and 17 years old. We heard that Philadelphia was a calmer place with more opportunities to get ahead. We knocked on doors of other immigrants to find work and connect with the community. As people of faith we went to the Visitation church, and there we were greeted with open arms, everything was as we had imagined and we were happy despite the struggle as immigrants.

In 2010 my oldest son was a victim of ICE detainers (ICE holds). The reason for his deportation was a false accusation, misinformation and bad advice from his lawyer. My son was deported for being a person of good heart and helping a friend. My son loaned money to an American friend. When my son attempted to collect the money that he had loaned this person, the American called the police and accused him of having threatened him with a weapon, then police arrested my son and arrested him. ICE immediately put a hold on him. My son was in jail for six months waiting for his trial. We had to hire an attorney to defend him who charged us a hefty amount of money, who advised my son that if he pled guilty he would be released immediately, and my son did this thinking that he would be released. Instead, he was picked up by immigration and deported. He had been living in the US for 19 years, he grew up here, he had dreams of studying to be a pilot and serve this country.

My son was a large hearted young man, involved in the community and in the church. The deportation of our son has caused us unimaginable pain, not only to him, but everyone in the family, including his brother who was very close to him. It is an injustice that we must suffer this much pain, when we contribute to the growth of this city by paying taxes and giving life to the city with diversity and building new businesses. We are all children of God on this earth and deserve a place to live without fear. ICE holds destroy families every day, they have destroyed mine, and it has been devastating for us that one day my son left for work and never came back again. No one deserves this cruel punishment of being torn from his family.

The city of Philadelphia and has a legal system that is responsible for making a decision when people commit some kind of crime. When working with the police to destroy immigrant families, the city is violating the rights of immigrants to due process. It also does not reflect that this is the city of brotherly love, as they say. After my son was ripped from our home, we now fear that we cannot call the police if we need help. The connection between the police and immigration has created terror in our communities and makes neighborhoods more dangerous because it is very hard to report crime or ask for help if we are victims.

The city of Philadelphia should practice what it preaches and truly become a welcoming city, a city of brotherhood. That's why I thank the council for supporting us and ask Mayor Nutter and his administration to be brave, put yourself in our shoes, end the ICE holds and disconnect the police and local jails from ICE. As a mother who was a victim of this unjust collaboration I ask that you listen to us and sign an executive order to block ICE Holds for ALL, not just for some, and so others do not have to live with the pain my family still lives.