

Good morning Members of the Assembly Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Karen Pedraza and I am a rising 3L at UC Davis School of Law.

I grew up in the verdant fields of Salinas, Ca and Yuma, Arizona. Rows after rows of lettuce, broccoli, and strawberries covered my neighborhood and pesticides filled the air. When I was young, every year, around November my family and I packed all our belongings into boxes and crates to drive down to the lettuce harvest in southern Arizona.

I remember it clearly as if it were yesterday, we packed dishes, old pots, and all clothes, in empty T&A boxes. My family and I all knew that come early November, we would start packing our things to drive down to Arizona and in May drive back up north. We did this for 14 years and it was the best part of my life. It created a type of bond with my family that can never be broken.

Although there was love and joy in these beautiful 14 years of my life, I also missed out on a lot of education as a result of the unstable nature of migrating. This was because when we arrived we often did not have a place to stay. One year my whole family stayed in my uncle's living room in his green trailer, the next year we bought a trailer, and the year after that we stayed at an apartment. I never knew if I was going to have a room of my own or a place to study. It would have been selfish if I did. I never knew how far I was going to be from school, if I had to walk or take the bus, but I knew that my older sister and my mom and I would get there.

After being enrolled in school in Arizona for about 6 or 5 months, it would be time to move back to Salinas. My sister and I would inform our teachers, pack our things, say our goodbyes, and drive down highway 8 back to Salinas. It was a cycle that to this day my body feels ever winter and spring.

At around the fourth grade, I realized that I didn't know how to read well. I had low grades, was terrible at math. As a result of the migrating and the educational inconsistencies, I got behind on my major subjects. It was the migrant program, bilingual program, and the after-school programs, and my mom that got me through my elementary education.

By my sophomore year in high school, I knew I wanted to go to college and I learned about the opportunities through Girls Inc. Girls Inc empowered us in many ways. They did workshops for us to learn about different careers, they brought an attorney who spoke to us about public interest work, and they took us to different universities. The mentors of Girls Inc. taught us about self-growth, self-care, and goal setting. Eventually, I graduated from North Salinas Highschool in 2011 and was accepted into Saint Mary's College of California.

Even though I excelled in college it was very difficult because I funded my way through it on my own. I worked three or two jobs every semester to make ends meet. I worked as an administrative secretary, babysitter, translator, Zumba teacher, and as a policy consultant and that is how I could pay rent. In between jobs I went to class and the writing center. I never knew a private tutor, but I used the resources on campus as best as I could. I also constantly applied for scholarships so that my parents wouldn't have to worry about money and could support my two youngest sisters.

The most difficult part of going to college was probably transitioning to and from because I was the first in my family to attend college and graduate from it. No one in my family had graduated high school in the United States and so there was no one I could reach out to. But there was one person who always was there to mentor me. Professor Myrna Santiago, my History teacher at Saint Mary's College, was always there to support me and listen to me through my struggles. Thereafter, it was always Latina mentors who had my back and showed me how to be professional, to write professionally and academically, and to overachieve to achieve.

After graduating from Saint Mary's College of California, I took two years off and studied the LSAT. It was very hard to study for the LSAT because I had to work a full-time job and a part time job to get by. Even though I had gotten a stipend to pay for the program, I didn't have a car, I had to take public transportation, and had to wake up at 5am to study. As a result, I got a low score and so one year later I took it again. In the end I got a decent score. I knew I had gotten a better score if I had gotten more time to study or could have taken off a couple months, but that was simply not possible for me. My family needed me to work, I had to make money to send back home in case of any emergency.

Today I am among the minority of Latinas who made it into law school. So far in my legal career I have been involved in the workers' rights clinic, the immigration clinic, and CRLAF. In all those positions, I have provided legal counsel to monolingual Spanish speakers or folks who are low income. I have provided legal services to rural communities like Woodland, low income and indigent folks in Sacramento, and will one day return to Salinas Valley to do the same. I have been fortunate enough to have made the right decisions and ended up where I am today. But not everyone receives the same opportunities as me.

I urge you to continue supporting programs that increase diversity in the profession because there are many people like me who want to give back to our communities. Programs like afterschool, writing workshops, reading programs, and the arts help students express themselves and find their passions like they did for me. In addition, I urge you to consider the many other qualities that students bring to the table besides a standardized test score. I also urge you to support more mental health programs that will empower families to deal with their stress and intergenerational trauma so that students can thrive in their careers and families can heal.

Thank you,