



WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH

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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR DC BILL B23-0402 - STANDBY GUARDIAN AMENDMENT ACT OF 2019 November 11, 2019

Many immigrants in our community are faced with uncertainty in these times of aggressive immigration enforcement and expanded and expedited enforcement of deportation proceedings. The current Administration has been systematically making it more difficult to immigrate to the United States. The President's actions have heightened fear of immigration enforcement raids and deportations, substantially increasing the precariousness of immigrants living in our community. It has been a policy of this Administration to spread misinformation and fear about immigrants to the United States and to seek to use fear of deportation and family separation as a tool of fear to dissuade immigration.

Recent actions attempting to expand the scope of expedited removal and the history of family separation and arbitrary detention in the United States highlights the need to protect the rights of detained and deported parents from being abrogated by U.S. government action. Families in Washington, DC are living with great uncertainty and fear caused by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Fear of deportation actions is heightened by the possibility that information submitted in immigration applications and scheduled meetings with immigration officials at USCIS facilities are used as opportunities for deportation by ICE officials. Based on these risks, some families may decide to forego immigration benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled.

Whitman-Walker's Legal Services Department sees the uncertainty of immigrant families first-hand. Whitman-Walker Health's immigration practice of over 20 years includes family-based immigration, inadmissibility waivers, removal defense, naturalization, adjustments, and applications for humanitarian-based relief such as asylum, U Visas, T Visas, VAWA, and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. We routinely advise our clients on ways to reduce or mitigate the uncertainty of their immigration situation, including documenting standby guardianship when available.

The Standby Guardianship Amendment Act of 2019, B23 - 0402, is a positive step forward to establishing safeguards against some of the most heinous consequences of existing immigration laws and policies. This bill provides parents with an opportunity to provide for the care of their minor children without fear of losing custody.

The bill would amend DC law to create a mechanism to protect the parental and custodial rights of parents and legal guardians subject to adverse immigration actions. Beyond creating peace of mind for parents as they engage in their daily activities of work and school, this bill may increase the opportunity to access legal immigration proceedings by addressing fears of permanent family separation.

We applaud the Council for their unanimous support of the bill and urge its speedy passage.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Brooks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "B" that are connected.

Benjamin Brooks
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