

The coldest winter in City X history was in December of 1980, the year my parents immigrated to the United States. My parents rode the midnight train and got off at their stop in City X. My father had less than \$100 in his wallet, from his job as a baker in Northern Iraq. They arrived at their new home with their sights set on the American dream, and little understanding of the long journey ahead of them.

As a first-generation Assyrian-American, I knew others regarded me as different. Classmates claimed that my homemade lunches smelled “funny”, and I received disparaging glances whenever speaking Aramaic with my parents in public. I spoke English fluently, but my elementary school placed me in English learning classes because of my accent. This confused me. As I helped my parents practice their speech and watched them overcome language barriers, I slowly came to realize throughout my early years that I faced the same cultural differences my parents had, albeit on a smaller scale. I often found myself following up with the fact that my family is from Iraq, “but we’re Christian.” I realized that my family and I would frequently have to qualify our ethnic origin and beautiful culture to be treated as equals with other American families.

During the spring semester of my sophomore year at X University, I stumbled upon a court case that not only moved me but helped shape how I want to practice law. The ruling of *Plyer v. Doe* ensured free public education access for unauthorized immigrant children in the United States. As a first-generation Assyrian-American, I encountered intolerant responses against my family’s immigrant status. However, *Plyer v. Doe* educated me, in a formal sense, on discrimination against immigrants and took a bold step toward recognizing undocumented immigrants as deserving of an education. This case served as a formal introduction to the systematic oppression immigrants face and how it can be combated in the courtroom. I was

fascinated, and it pushed me to feel a deep sense of appreciation for the opportunities I have been afforded as a U.S. born citizen – namely my education. I empathized with the experiences and challenges these individuals faced, drawing parallels to my parents’ experience with each page I pored over.

More recently, Assyrians have experienced waves of the same persecution my parents faced decades before, and in an equally injurious fashion. In the summer of 2017, Mr. Doe, a corporate attorney, organized a movement to protect hundreds of Assyrians facing deportation in Michigan. Mr. Doe and several other Assyrian attorneys provided *pro bono* legal aid, ensuring the detainees’ release, giving them citizenship opportunities, and securing therapists and trauma counselors for what they had endured. I drew significant inspiration from this and plan on leveraging my legal education to help Assyrians and other oppressed immigrants.

I feel a moral obligation to use my education and *pro bono* legal services to empower immigrants who are structurally oppressed. As I learned from *Plyer v. Doe*, every human deserves an education and to deny this right to children, who often do not have a say in determining their future, is simply unjust. Although I have maintained an interest in being a corporate attorney, and to leverage my business knowledge from my undergraduate degree, I cannot ignore the injustices thrust upon immigrants that I have witnessed firsthand. My experience as an Assyrian-American, coupled with knowing the plights of less fortunate children of immigrants, ignited my passion for pursuing a legal education.

As an attorney, I want to help incite an ideological change in the next generation, so that future immigrants and their children will not face the same discrimination that generations did before them. Through *pro bono* work and my legal education, I will fight for the respect and rights of those who came to America filled with the same hope as my parents.