

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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May 10, 2017
Start: 10:04 a.m.
Recess: 10:51 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
14th Fl.

B E F O R E:
CARLOS MENCHACA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Mathieu Eugene
Daniel Dromm
Peter A. Koo
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.
Deborah L. Rose

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Abraham Chea Tucker
President
Staten Island Liberian Community
Association

Diallo Mamadou Saliou
Representative
Guinea Refugees

Rev. Judy Brown
Executive Director
African Refuge

Madeline Akibo-Betts
Immigrant Specialist
African Refuge

Edward Josey
President
Staten Island Branch of NAACP

Didier Fall
President
Guinea Association of Staten Island

Bobby Digi
Executive Director
Island Voice

[sound check]

[pause]

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Buenos dias a todos. My name is Carlos Menchaca; I'm the chair of the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration.

Before going any further, I'd like to introduce the other members of our committee who are here with us today. From Queens we have Council Member Dromm; from Queens, Peter Koo. We'll be joined later by some other Council Members.

The City of New York has always welcomed immigrants with open arms; never is this more true than when a city welcomes and supports immigrants in need of humanitarian assistance.

Today we will explore how the United States and the City of New York can support nationals of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone who were granted temporary protected status (TPS) in 2014 on account of their inability to safely return to their countries which were enthralled in a massive Ebola epidemic.

Despite the Federal Government's ability to extend the status, the Department of Homeland

1 Security announced in September 2016 under the Obama
2 Administration that the designation for these three
3 countries would be terminated effective May 21, 2017.
4 Those individuals in TPS status who did not
5 previously have lawful status or did not acquire
6 other lawful status while in the United States must
7 return to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone despite
8 the fact that these countries are still struggling to
9 rebuild their economic infrastructure and health care
10 resources, which were severely depleted by the Ebola
11 epidemic.
12

13 Today the Committee on Immigration will
14 hear a Preconsidered Resolution, sponsored by Council
15 Member Debi Rose of Staten Island, which calls upon
16 the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
17 to re-designate and extend temporary protected status
18 for these countries because these countries have not
19 yet stabilized after the Ebola epidemic and nationals
20 residing abroad cannot safely return home at this
21 time.

22 Staten Island is home to the largest
23 Liberian community in the United States and New York
24 City has sizable Guinean and Sierra Leonean
25 communities, so I would like to thank Council Member

1
2 Debi Rose for putting forth this important resolution
3 which Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, I and many
4 others in the City Council are proud today to
5 support.

6 I would also like to thank Council Member
7 Rose for leading a letter-writing campaign to
8 Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly in order to
9 highlight the continued humanitarian crisis in each
10 of these affected countries. This resolution is
11 truly a testament to Council Member Rose's and the
12 City Council's commitment to protecting and
13 supporting our immigrant communities.

14 I would like to thank advocates and
15 members of the community who are here to testify and
16 support this very, very important and critical
17 resolution.

18 And so now we would like to begin the
19 voting process to vote this out of Committee and onto
20 the floor of the City Council this morning, and I'd
21 like to call the vote.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Committee Clerk Matthew
23 DeStefano, Committee on Immigration, roll call on the
24 Preconsidered Resolution. Chair Menchaca.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I proudly vote
3 aye.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Dromm.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Permission to
6 explain my vote.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: Chair.

8 [background comment]

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, **[inaudible]**...
10 [crosstalk]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I just wanted to
12 point out two very important facts that are here in
13 the resolution and it says that whereas approximately
14 17,300 children lost one or both parents to Ebola
15 during the 2014 outbreak -- that is an incredible
16 number of children to be parentless -- and also that
17 prior to the Ebola outbreaks, the three countries
18 already had a ratio of only 1:2 doctors for nearly
19 100,000 people. So there is still going to be a lot
20 of struggle going on in these countries and this
21 temporary protected status help would have a great
22 impact on those countries and the people living here
23 in the United States as well. So I want to
24 congratulate Council Member Rose and I thank you,
25 Chair and with that I vote yes.

1
2 COMMITTEE CLERK: Koo.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I wanna say
4 congratulations to Chair Menchaca and also Council
5 Member Rose for their support of this very important
6 immigration issue. I vote yes.

7 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 3 in the
8 affirmative, 0 in the negative and no abstentions,
9 the Preconsidered Resolution has been adopted.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much
11 and we'll leave the vote open for members that might
12 be coming in; we have a busy morning of hearings, and
13 I'm gonna hand this over to Council Member Dromm to
14 chair the rest of the hearing; I will be heading over
15 to Brooklyn to support a citywide effort to support
16 adult education budget request of the \$12 million we
17 want returned to the City budget, so I will be
18 heading over there; as chair of the Immigration
19 Committee, I'll hand this over to Council Member
20 Dromm to chair the rest and hear testimony from our
21 public. Thank you.

22 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much and
23 Chair Rose, did you have a statement that you.. I mean
24 Council Member Rose; did you have a statement that
25 you wanted to make?

1 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Yes, I do.

2 CHAIR DROMM: Yes, please.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you. First I
4 wanna thank the Committee members for voting in the
5 affirmative for this resolution; it means a lot to a
6 great number of people here in New York City.
7

8 So I'd like to say good morning and I
9 have a few thank yous to start with. I wanna thank
10 Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for granting my request
11 for an emergency resolution today, and it's an
12 emergency because this TPS order will expire on May
13 21, and so it therefore made it emergent. So I'm
14 thankful for her support for this emergent resolution
15 today to support the extension of temporary protected
16 status for Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone; to
17 Council Member Menchaca for adjusting his schedule so
18 quickly to hear a hearing on this urgent matter; and
19 to my staff and the Immigration Committee staff for
20 so quickly pulling everything together to make this
21 hearing and resolution possible. I want to also
22 thank Congressman Donald Payne for championing this
23 issue in Congress, and to my constituents for coming
24 forward collectively as a community to ask for help
25 of the Council.

1
2 As has been said many times, it takes a
3 village, and in this case, to avert what would be a
4 grave humanitarian crisis.

5 I am speaking of the prospect of
6 thousands of nationals living in the United States,
7 and many of them here in New York City and many of
8 them in my district, being forced to return
9 prematurely to countries that were ravaged by the
10 Ebola crisis of 2014-2016.

11 TPS, or temporary protected status, for
12 Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is set to expire on
13 May 21, 2017. This status was granted because these
14 three countries were experiencing a public health
15 crisis of extraordinary proportions due to the sudden
16 outbreak of the Ebola virus, and as a result, they
17 are now facing health professional shortages,
18 infrastructure damage and economic devastation and
19 the challenge of reintegrating over 17,000 survivors,
20 many of them children living in extreme poverty, many
21 of them orphaned, and were the nationals living here
22 now to return, they would be returning to a situation
23 of no jobs, no homes and no infrastructure to support
24 them. The African immigrants and nationals living in
25 New York City contribute significantly to our local

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2 economy and to their home economics through
3 remittances, thus sending support to communities in
4 need, helping them to rebuild and creating a vital
5 link between our two economies.

6 At today's hearing we will hear from a
7 representative from Congressman Payne's office who
8 will update us on the efforts to extend TPS for
9 Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and we will hear
10 from members of those communities currently living in
11 New York City who will talk about how losing this
12 status is impacting them with the prospect of losing
13 jobs, health care, and even their home. I thank them
14 all for making the time to come to share their
15 stories in the chambers of City Hall today, and I
16 thank you all. Thank you, Chair.

17 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much Council
18 Member Rose. And I see a few more people have walked
19 in, so if they do wanna give testimony, you should
20 fill out one of these sheets and we can then call
21 you.

22 But let me start now by calling up the
23 first two people, and that would be Abraham Tucker,
24 representing the Liberian community and Mamadou
25 Diallo, representing the Guinea community. Step

1 right over here. [background comments] And is Rev.
2 Judy Brown here? [background comment] Okay; would
3 she come forward as well? Okay; would you like to
4 start over here, sir? [background comment] Just
5 push the button so the red light is on. [background
6 comments] Yeah. And if you could just state your
7 name and your affiliation for the record.
8

9 ABRAHAM CHEA TUCKER: My name is Abraham
10 Chea Tucker; I'm the President of the Staten Island
11 Liberian Community Association (SILCA) on Staten
12 Island; I represent close to 10,000 Liberians on
13 Staten Island. Staten Island is the home of many
14 Liberians, Liberians who are all over the City of New
15 York, but Staten Island happens to be the homebase
16 that hosts most Liberians.

17 Our country was impacted by a 14-year
18 civil war which ended in 2003; coupled with that our
19 country was also struck by Ebola in 2014. Those two
20 events led to a lot of devastation on the country and
21 the people. In the war we lost over 200,000 people
22 -- that includes men, women and children. The Ebola
23 too also took away lives of children, women and men,
24 and our country and our people **[inaudible]** those
25 impacts and they have not recovered. Some of them,

1 through the courtesy of the United States government,
2 sought refuge in the United States and were given
3 temporary statuses; some of these statuses will be
4 expired a week from now or a couple weeks from now
5 and this is why we are here, to make our case.

7 A couple weeks ago we brought our case to
8 Councilwoman Debi Rose, who is our direct
9 representative on Staten Island, to explain our
10 plight to her; she wasted no time to listen to our
11 plight and also to present it to you, the City
12 Council Members who **[inaudible]** Councilwoman Debi
13 Rose to speak and all of the City Council Members who
14 have taken this issue very seriously **[inaudible]**
15 plight.

16 There are many of my brethren who are
17 here today from those countries, from the event of
18 the civil war and the Ebola crisis; there are people
19 who lost their family, entire village were wiped out;
20 the entire family **[inaudible]**; some of them are
21 surviving members, only surviving member of their
22 family and luckily for them, they were able to get
23 established in America and those people are now
24 supporting your [sic] families and communities in
25 America, so those people are also contributing to the

1 good of the country, economically and socially as
2 well. So we... they found [sic] the United States or
3 Staten Island as a refuge, as a home for them; some
4 of them are settled, they are working, they are
5 contributing to society, making meaningful
6 contributions to our society on Staten Island and in
7 New York, so therefore, there is no structure put in
8 place by our Liberian government [sic] at this time
9 to even receive them. The poverty rate is very hard
10 in Liberia; the literacy rate is almost 90%. The
11 only employer in the country that hires employees in
12 the country is the Liberian government and a lot of
13 things are not in place, so the return of those
14 people will be **[inaudible]** on the society; the
15 society there is already having difficulties; coupled
16 with the people being sent back, would not be fair
17 enough. So we are extending our plea to the
18 President of the United States and all lawmakers in
19 this country to listen to the plea of the people of
20 Liberia, the people of Sierra Leone and the people of
21 Guinea to see a reason why they can stay here so that
22 they can be... to contribute to the United States and
23 also to **[inaudible]** their countries. I thank you.

1
2 And not to cut you off; accompanied by me
3 is one of my community members who also lost
4 relatives in the Ebola crisis, so she is suffering
5 the effect as we speak. Many could not be here today
6 because the fear of reprisal from immigration
7 officers that probably will **[inaudible]** so some of
8 them have to stay in the shadow, would not want to
9 come to such a hearing. So it is a very serious
10 issue; it is weighing down our community, so we again
11 want to say thank you for bringing this in a very
12 short time as an emergency issue to address. Thank
13 you again.

14 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much. Next,
15 please.

16 DIALLO MAMADOU SALIOU: Hello. Good
17 morning. My name is Diallo Mamadou Saliou [sp?]; I'm
18 representing Guinea and I'm the President of one of
19 the largest cities in Guinea called Mamou and I'm
20 here on behalf of my country and on our neighboring
21 country, which is Sierra Leone and Liberia, due to
22 this TPS situation.

23 And first of all, I would like to thank
24 the United States for their generosity throughout the
25 years that they have been helping our communities and

1
2 other countries around the world; it is some
3 generosity in which many countries don't have the
4 capacity or the willingness to do. And during the
5 Ebola outbreak we have lost many lives and
6 statistically, we were told it's about 10,000, or
7 that's a rough number, 'cause these numbers are only
8 based on the people that was counted; what about the
9 people that was not being able to be counted or being
10 able to go to the hospitals for treatment? And so to
11 me, it's an infinite number. And these people that
12 were able to come here, had been granted TPS to stay
13 here and work and support their families is a very
14 big hope for people back home; not only they support
15 them economically, but they do help them emotionally
16 too, 'cause they have very big support on them.

17 So seeing this situation at hand right
18 now is very critical, 'cause we have almost about
19 5,000 people within these three countries that were
20 granted TPS, and looking at the situation of this
21 country right now, if the TPS is not extended; these
22 people are facing a high risk of being deported under
23 immigration law. Therefore, we are asking again the
24 President of the United States and all the lawmakers
25 to please take this into consideration, as they

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2 already did, starting by the City Council of New
3 York, and throughout the whole country to please take
4 this matter and help out these people to stay in here
5 and work so that they can support their people back
6 home, 'cause these three countries, as mentioned my
7 brother, we are Third World countries, not developed
8 at all, especially in the healthcare situations. Not
9 only we don't have equipment; we don't even have
10 hospitals for that matter. Many of these people died
11 because there were no place where to put them. And
12 the government tried their best, but their best is
13 not good enough for these people, for these major
14 countries, especially in Guinea, where the area that
15 was really impacted; for them to leave the area and
16 get to the capitol, it would take them days, 'cause
17 they assume the medication is at Conakry, where they
18 have like maybe two hospitals, may have two
19 hospitals. And after this outbreak, it really put
20 back the country backwards; knowing first, that we
21 don't have the equipment or the facilities, but an
22 outbreak like this has set us backwards more than
23 where we were. So sending back these people down
24 there will be another disaster, 'cause not only they
25 are helping out, but a lot of people -- as we

1 mentioned earlier -- a lot of children that lost both
2 parents in this crisis and some of them have been
3 adopted by relatives and these are some of the
4 relatives living here on the TPS to help them out.
5 Let's remember, these kids, all of them are under 18
6 years of age; they need school, housing, food, and
7 everything depends on those people that have been
8 granted the TPS to work here. So we are asking you
9 and urging you one more time to please reconsider on
10 extending the TPS for our communities and our
11 citizens. Thank you and God bless you and God bless
12 the United States of America.

14 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much. Next,
15 please.

16 REV. JUDY BROWN: Good morning and thank
17 you so kindly for Councilwoman Debi Rose and this
18 august body for convening this hearing this morning;
19 it is so vital and very, very important. My name is
20 Reverend Judy Brown and I am the Executive Director
21 of the African Refuge, which provides services to the
22 largest settlement of West Africans here in New York.
23 We not only deal with the three countries that were
24 mainly affected by Ebola, but all of West Africans,

1 including people from the Ivory Coast, people from --
2 just everywhere in West Africa.

3
4 But I'm here today because I just want to
5 be on record as saying that we must do everything
6 humanly possible to actually keep and get the TPS
7 extended. Many of the individuals who came over did
8 not come over to America and have been living in the
9 shadows, but they have come over with passports and
10 therefore they're on record, they're easily traced
11 and identified, which means that if any actions for
12 deportation were to happen, we would believe that our
13 community would just be overwhelmed with ICE coming
14 in and disturbing the quietness of the community and
15 to expose children to such horrific trauma that is
16 beyond measure. In addition to that, we have many
17 elderly in the community who've come over and have
18 not been able to gain command of the English language
19 and therefore they still sign their names with an X.
20 These individuals could never become citizens because
21 they do not have the skills and a command of the
22 English language to do so and a lot of them are
23 elderly, and to displace them back into a country
24 that is already in disrepair and poverty-stricken
25 would just be horrendous. These are individuals who

1 not only are victims of Ebola but have also been
2 victims of war, so the trauma of war victimization
3 and then being brought to America as refugees and
4 then sent back under deportation would just be really
5 inhumane. So we are understand that the TPS -- the
6 ending of the TPS was a result of Americans' efforts
7 of going into the country and doing a wonderful job
8 of cleaning up and we applaud the global effort that
9 was employed to bring about stability in Africa, but
10 we know that the effects have been devastating and
11 those effects have not all been adequately addressed
12 -- the infrastructures, the roads, the electricity;
13 the homes -- we're sending people back to places
14 where there were once houses but now there is nothing
15 and tell them to live again. Any effort that this
16 Council can do to lend their support to the effort to
17 speak to Homeland Security, and even to address our
18 President of these United States of America to make a
19 plea for these extension of the TPS and not only
20 that; we also know that the DED is in effect and
21 we're looking at, in another few months, the
22 expiration of the DED. So both of these, TPS and DED
23 are very essential that we advocate and that we lend
24 our support and expertise to get them extended; that
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1
2 the people from West Africa can live freely, not in
3 shadows, continue to contribute to the American
4 society and continue to use their skills and
5 expertise to make America a better place.

6 So I want to thank you very, very much
7 for your time, and any ways that we can build
8 pathways to citizenship is definitely something that
9 we advocate and support. Thank you so much.

10 CHAIR DROMM: Well thank you very much
11 for your testimony. You are absolutely right, that
12 it's vitally important that we pass this resolution,
13 and it's passed Committee; we are waiting for one
14 more person to come to vote, so we will hold the vote
15 open till 10:45; hopefully that member of the
16 Committee will come before then, and then make it a
17 four-person in favor vote, and then it will go to the
18 floor of the City Council and hopefully it will pass
19 there -- I believe that it will pass there.

20 I think that this Council recognizes the
21 struggles of the three countries and you know I was
22 the former chairperson of the Immigration Committee;
23 I'm chair of Education now..

24 REV. JUDY BROWN: Okay.
25

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2 CHAIR DROMM: and so the issues that
3 you've outlined, especially in regard to the plight
4 of the children, are ones that really affect my
5 heart. And it should be noted as well that there
6 were 28,639 suspected probably and confirmed cases of
7 Ebola and 11,316 deaths from Ebola. Now here in New
8 York City, we had a bit of a scare with Ebola, but it
9 was basically only a scare, and people were terrified
10 of what that might mean, but could you imagine living
11 in the country where it originated and how
12 devastating an impact it must have on those who lost
13 loved ones?

14 So I also wanna congratulate Council
15 Member Debi Rose, because when I was chair of the
16 Immigration Committee, she always told me -- don't
17 forget the West African community, and make sure that
18 they are involved in all of the immigration
19 decisions. So you do have a great representative in
20 Council Member Debi Rose; she is always fighting and
21 looking out for you.

22 So I wanna say thank you to you for
23 coming in. Council Member Rose; did you have
24 anything that you wanted to add?

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Not really, Chair,
3 because I think you articulated the issue and the
4 importance of us moving quickly and expeditiously on
5 TPS.

6 I think it's really important that, you
7 know the record reflect how devastating Ebola was to
8 a country that was really sort of already functioning
9 marginally and the impact that returning people back
10 to a country lacking infrastructure, and the
11 statistic was so glaring to me that you had prior to
12 Ebola a ratio of 1:2 doctors per 100,000 people; that
13 -- you know, in the time when we are now fighting to
14 save healthcare here in the United States to ensure
15 that all Americans have health coverage and care, to
16 even contemplate sending people back to a country
17 that prior to had a ratio of 1:2 doctors per 100,000
18 people, back to a country where that ratio doesn't
19 even exist; the infrastructure is no longer there;
20 the hospitals are not there. The fact that we're
21 taking children who are in school now, who have the
22 ability to improve their lives and to become
23 literate, whereas you so eloquently stated that we
24 have many elders that are here who cannot read and
25 would not ever be able to pass the citizenship test,

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2 you know and we are educating young people so that
3 they can be productive citizens you know here or
4 wherever; it's just so important and I wanna thank
5 you for being here and so well articulating this
6 struggle. And I wanna thank this Committee and the
7 Chair for being so open to this emergent situation.
8 Thank you.

9 REV. JUDY BROWN: Thank you.

10 CHAIR DROMM: Granted we can get it done
11 before the 21st deadline as well, so I think that was
12 critical.

13 We do have one more person who wants to
14 give testimony, but before I call that person, I just
15 wanna call on Council Member Espinal, who has now
16 joined us, to vote. Clerk.

17 COMMITTEE CLERK: Committee on
18 Immigration, continuation of roll call on the
19 Preconsidered Resolution. Council Member Espinal.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: I proudly vote
21 aye.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: The vote now stands at
23 4 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative; no
24 abstentions.

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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CHAIR DROMM: 'Kay. And with that, I'd like to close the vote, but I would also like to call up to the table for testimony, Madeline Akibo-Betts, representing today the Country of Sierra Leone. Are there any other speakers in the audience who would like to speak? [background comments] Okay.

[background comments]

[pause]

MADELINE AKIBO-BETTS: Good morning...

[interpose]

CHAIR DROMM: Hold on just one second, 'cause I need to just call you in and the other members who have joined the panel, okay? [background comments] Alright, so fill out those forms and then our first speaker -- is that Madeline Betts?

MADELINE AKIBO-BETTS: Yes.

CHAIR DROMM: Okay. Why don't you go ahead and then I'll announce the other two as soon as the forms are filled out. Thank you. Yeah, just put that red light on. [background comment] Okay.

MADELINE AKIBO-BETTS: Good morning everybody, good morning **[inaudible]** Debi Rose, Council Members and ladies and gentlemen. I am Madeline Akibo-Betts and I work for African Refuge as

1
2 Immigrant Specialist and I've lived in the United
3 States for 27 years. I'm here as a concerned Sierra
4 Leone; I'll be speaking from the heart.

5 Sierra Leone, for some of you who don't
6 know, as far back -- if we were to go back to history
7 -- is one of those countries that have suffered all
8 along, beginning from the days of slavery. These are
9 the same people that came over here in boats and up
10 to this time it's as if we're still not settled yet.

11 Now Sierra Leone is the same country also
12 recovering from war and this war happened over 20+
13 years ago and it created so much problem over there;
14 to this day, is so much unemployment, is chaos, is
15 poverty, is squalor, is just so much; even the
16 government, they can't handle most of the problems.
17 So that when Ebola struck it was yet another problem
18 for us; we couldn't handle it, because even the very
19 doctors, our very doctors died; we lost over a dozen
20 doctors, and it brought about another new set of
21 hardships, fear, chaos; people didn't know what to
22 do; some of them eventually landed here. And it was
23 my pleasure on a day to receive a call from my
24 attorney that the former President Obama had granted
25 temporary status. If I was to give a picture of what

1
2 happened to me on that day, my belly was on the floor
3 thanking God, tears rolling down my eyes; that's how
4 happy I was, **[inaudible]** I would call it. And that's
5 the very thing that pushed me here today; that I
6 would not sit by and let something this just die a
7 natural death.

8 I'm here -- this is a desperate plea for
9 help that TPS be renewed, please. The reason being;
10 some of our people, they depend on us, even Sierra
11 Leone, the country itself, the economy is so bad,
12 it's like if we are over here unemployed, I mean
13 going through all of these other things, it's just a
14 helpless situation. So I'm asking you please to just
15 consider renewing this temporary protected status for
16 another 18 months. Another reason; the reports
17 coming from back home is still bad -- is looting, is
18 mayhem, is murder, everything is taking place because
19 people see that their future is at stake, there is
20 nobody to talk to; even over here, I would say if TPS
21 is not renewed -- one of the things I expressed the
22 other day -- people are gonna lose benefits, they
23 will become jobless, unemployed, and is another fear
24 -- homelessness and -- it is just too much. So there
25 is this saying, if you've never suffered before --

1
2 and you heard about suffering -- you will turn a
3 blind eye. But I just want you all to just put
4 yourself in our shoes; if like you went to another
5 country and you were enduring hardship, nobody to
6 talk to, no help forthcoming, it's like everything
7 seems... the future seems bleak; what would you do? So
8 that's the point we've come to, and right now there's
9 the fear; everybody's looking to see what's gonna
10 happen on May 21 when TPS will come to an end. So It
11 is with this I'm here as a desperate mother, a
12 desperate Sierra Leonean and a desperate African
13 pleading to the United States please for TPS to be
14 extended one more time. I thank you all so much for
15 your attention and I bless the United States of
16 America. Indeed, God bless America. Thank you.

17 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you for that very
18 moving testimony. Thank you.

19 MADELINE AKIBO-BETTS: Thank you.

20 CHAIR DROMM: Next, please.

21 EDWARD JOSEY: Good morning. My name is
22 Ed Josey; I'm the President... [interpose]

23 CHAIR DROMM: I don't think your light is
24 on; just see if that red light is on.

25

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2 EDWARD JOSEY: Thank you. 'Kay, my name
3 is Edward Josey; I'm the President of Staten Island
4 Branch for NAACP; I'm a member of Council District 49
5 in which our Council Member Debi Rose is residing.

6 I stand before you a matter of urgency.
7 Now you just heard this lady here speak about the
8 conditions in her home country; I do remember when
9 the Ebola scare hit this world; there were a lot of
10 rumors going around about we should avoid people who
11 come from those countries; there was a lot of rumors
12 that just create a lot of hype in this country. I
13 can recall going to a meeting at different schools
14 and different places all over Staten Island and which
15 people were trying to set the record straight as to
16 what this whole thing was about. Were they
17 successful? I don't know, but I do know that people
18 lost their lives, people in this country to come from
19 those various countries -- Liberia, Sierra Leone and
20 Guinea -- they were terrified; the world was
21 terrified; what was gonna happen to the whole entire
22 world; there was just a sheer panic and rumors that
23 were false rumors. And the United States, as the big
24 lady in the river down the street, the Statue of
25 Liberty says give me your tired, your poor, your

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2 hungry; I will protect you, America stepped forward
3 and they did bring people here who needed help, and
4 those same people right now are fearful of going back
5 to this home country and the epidemic is still
6 running rampant. Now I do, you know, scan the
7 internet quite frequently and I do try to keep
8 abreast with things in this country, plus other parts
9 of the world, and I can see pictures of people
10 getting this disease and they just, seem to just
11 vanish overnight, so to me it's an urgent thing that
12 you do extend this temporary protected status; you
13 have the power, I hope, and the strength to do it and
14 I would urge you to please do that, because May 21st
15 is less than two weeks away; now I would hate to see
16 these people have to go back and to a situation
17 perhaps maybe, in their eyesight, to die; that's not
18 a very pleasant thought, so please do what you can
19 do. Thank you.

20 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much, and
21 next, please.

22 DIDIER FALL: Good morning. **[inaudible]**.
23 Good morning, Council Member Debi Rose. My name is
24 Didier Fall; I'm the President of the Guinea
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2 community in Staten Island and active member of all
3 Guinea community in United States of America.

4 As you know, a few years ago our country,
5 Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, was hit, terribly
6 hit by a disease at the beginning nobody knows what
7 was it; this disease was Ebola. Unfortunately, at
8 the beginning people start, our government, it start
9 hiding, so by the end of it we find out it was Ebola.
10 At the time it come forward for people to know what
11 it was and the exact type of the disease it was
12 Ebola, very, very, very, very virus disease who can
13 kill anything any time. So I know actually, as you
14 know, **[inaudible]**, on May 21 all these TPS will be
15 expired, so if I stand here today I'm talking on
16 behalf of my people; as you can hear, my brothers and
17 sisters, we really plea you to help us extend this
18 TPS; otherwise it's gonna be very, very critical for
19 these people whose gonna return back to the country;
20 they don't have nothing to do there, no more, no
21 more, and they're really, really scared. At this
22 time, as many fought, even few days ago; not even two
23 weeks ago, we still have the same kind of disease who
24 start to sporadically turn on in Liberia, but they
25 find out this was not Ebola early. So your

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[inaudible], as I said earlier, please help us to consider to renew this TPS program. Thank you. God bless America.

CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much, and I wanna thank all three panelists, and thank you, NAACP as well for always being in the forefront of these fights. Thank you. And we have one more panel coming up.

So I just can't read the last name, but it's... I think it's Bobby Dye. [background comment] Digi. I'm sorry. [background comments]

BOBBY DIGI: Good morning.

CHAIR DROMM: Island Voices?

BOBBY DIGI: Yes...

CHAIR DROMM: Oh okay, you... [crosstalk]

BOBBY DIGI: Dan; how are you?

CHAIR DROMM: you wrote it quick...

[crosstalk]

BOBBY DIGI: We're... We're Face... We're Facebook friends.

CHAIR DROMM: You've got **[inaudible]** handwriting. Yeah. [laughter] Alright, Bobby; go ahead, please.

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2 BOBBY DIGI: Good morning all. Thanks
3 for making time for this. My name is Bobby Digi; I'm
4 the Executive Director of Island Voice; I'm also a
5 first-generation American; my dad's from West
6 African; I'm from Staten Island, Councilwoman Debi
7 Rose's district.

8 We've advocated for the African community
9 on Staten Island for over 15 years at this point, and
10 really, sort of during the Ebola crisis, being one of
11 the agencies that were advocating for services and
12 just clarity when there was so much confusion.

13 Again we're in a state of confusion once
14 more in the community; families are dealing with a
15 high level of anxiety not know what their fate will
16 be, and we have to keep in mind that it's not just
17 families that are here, but families that over in
18 Africa as well. So you know America, we stand for a
19 nation that's always opened its door and projects and
20 always amplifies the need to be at the forefront of
21 salvage and humanity, and I think that we're at a
22 moment now where we can demonstrate these values and
23 just small gestures.

24 I see these people potentially that will
25 be deported as some of the most hardworking members

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2 of the community that I've had the opportunity to
3 work with, interact with, see their children; see
4 their family members, so I've come here representing
5 my organization and also wearing other hats in the
6 community and representing some of those other
7 organizations to just say that whatever support that
8 the Council could offer, and we are very grateful for
9 the leadership that our Councilwoman has displayed,
10 that if we can get as much support in renewing the
11 status so that we can bring peace to the community
12 and so the family members begin to focus on building
13 their lives; that's what we're here for. So we're
14 fully onboard, Island Voice, and we have over 1,000
15 people looking to really get involved -- just on my
16 way here there were people that are looking to
17 support. So whatever the Council needs from us to
18 make it easier or to assist, we're willing to do.
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much. And
21 you know I think you just came in, so you didn't
22 hear, but I did congratulate and thank Council Member
23 Debi Rose also, because I used to be the chair of
24 this committee; I'm now chair of Education, but she
25 has been a constant advocate for the African

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2 community, in terms of the whole immigration issue,
3 and always reminding us not to forget the African
4 community, both our immigrants and our refugees, so...

5 BOBBY DIGI: That's right.

6 CHAIR DROMM: thank you for coming, and I
7 really appreciate it.

8 BOBBY DIGI: Thank you for making time
9 today. Thank you. Thank you.

10 CHAIR DROMM: Council Member Rose; do you
11 wanna take us out?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Again, I wanna
13 thank all of you for coming and for sharing very
14 poignant stories about pre and post civil war, pre;
15 post Ebola and the impact that it's had on West
16 African countries that are affected by TPS. I want
17 to again say to you that we understand the emergent
18 situation that you're in and that we are taking
19 whatever steps that we can to try to get this
20 reauthorized and extended. And so again, I wanna
21 thank the chair of the Immigration Committee, which
22 is Carlos Menchaca, and for the very able chair of
23 the Education Committee who stepped in because Chair
24 Menchaca is out championing a bigger, you know,
25 immigration issue this morning.

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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So with that, I'd like to say thank you
to all of you and..

CHAIR DROMM: Thank you very much, and so
this issue will be brought to the floor of the City
Council this afternoon at 1:30, and we will have a
final vote on that later on today. So I wanna thank
you all for coming in and with at, I will say this
meeting is now adjourned.

[gavel]

[clapping]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 8, 2017