



**AFRICAN  
COMMUNITIES  
TOGETHER**



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 6th, 2019

**For press inquiries:** Nekessa Opoti [nekessa@undocublack.org](mailto:nekessa@undocublack.org) | (612) 460-0656

**DED holder Yatta Kiazolu Testifies at House Judiciary Committee**

***“I am here for all the working class immigrants on DED, TPS, and are also DREAM eligible.”***



Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins, and members of this committee thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Yatta Kiazolu, I am 28 years old and I am a beneficiary of Deferred Enforced Departure also known as DED. In addition, I am a PhD Candidate in the Department of History at UCLA with plans to graduate by Fall 2019. After 22 years in the U.S., however, 25 days from now

Liberian DED will end and my entire life will be interrupted. I have only visited Liberia once as a toddler and I have never lived in the country.

I am here today to appeal to Congress to create a permanent solution on behalf of myself and the thousands of Liberians who have rebuilt their lives here in the United States.

I was born Botswana to Liberian national parents and arrived in the U.S. at 6 years old in

1997. My father worked as a professor at the University of Botswana for the United Nations, while my mother was a stay-at-home parent and later worked as a teacher at a local school. We had no other family in Botswana.

When my parents made an attempt to move back to Liberia after the first civil war, in fear of my safety, my mother sent me to live in Georgia with my grandmother, while they assessed the situation. Living with my grandmother in the States provided me security and stability I otherwise would not have known because the fragile political climate soon descended into a second civil war. My mother joined me soon after. In fact, one of my fondest memories at this age was being in a Little League in Decatur, GA where my cousins and I made up almost the entire team.

I have been a recipient of both TPS and DED. If DACA had not been rescinded it is possible that I would have been a Dreamer, as well. The protection of these relief programs allowed me to maintain a stable and healthy life, despite living deadline to deadline. The ability to attend college and graduate from Delaware State University with honors helped me discover my passion for history and higher education. In undergrad, I was an active member of my campus community leading student organizations, joined the public service sorority Delta Sigma Theta, and even completed internships at congressional local offices.

DED made it possible for me to leave the U.S. in 2012, through Advanced Parole, for the first time since my arrival, to travel to South Africa. I participated in the UC Office of the President-HBCU Initiative. I was thrilled to be able to travel freely with my classmates for once. This program exposed me to graduate education and is the reason I decided to pursue my doctorate in history at UCLA. On campus, I have been a strong advocate of student support, led numerous diversity and inclusion initiatives, and worked as a teaching assistant for undergraduate courses. In my local community, I work to support student access to higher education through tutoring and working as an adjunct instructor.

Nothing I have accomplished thus far would be possible without the unwavering support of my family, who are here with me today. I am here because of the love and labor of my mother, grandmother, and aunties who, when I first arrived, were all working class Black immigrant women. They worked jobs that required them to stand on their feet for sometimes over 10 hours a day in order to protect me and offer me space to imagine, dream, and explore my world as a child should. Their resilience, hope, and lessons about goodwill inspire my graduate research about histories of Black women's political activism. My grandmother used to say "When you do good, you don't do it for yourself, you do it for God." [pause] And with that philosophy as my personal mantra, though the majority of my family are now permanent residents and U.S. citizens, I am here for all the working class immigrants on DED, TPS, and are also DREAM-eligible. I am here for all young people like myself who have anxiety about their futures.

If Congress allows DED to end in 25 days, I do not know what will happen to me. My mother loses sleep at night worrying about me. I want to graduate this year and begin my career in higher education. I am incredibly passionate about teaching history, public history programming, and student mentorship. Through various roles in the classroom over the last five years, I have been invested in the academic and personal achievement of over 200 students, especially those who are historically underrepresented. As a product of dedicated advocates, I want to be able to give back, especially to students who have limited access to higher education. To this end, it is my greatest appeal that Congress create a permanent path to citizenship for DED and similar programs like DACA and TPS.

Thank you for your time,

Yatta Kiazolu