

Mary Courtney
64 95 Broadway Apt 7U
Bronx, NY 10471
(646) 361-3596

January 31, 2022

Greetings to all members of this committee and thank you for giving me and my fellow activists this opportunity to have our voices heard today.

I was born and raised in the parish of Castlegregory, Co.Kerry, Ireland. This is the homeplace of Governor Kathy Hochul's grandparents.

I know that she has a very sincere and deep understanding of what their lives were like when they first arrived in this country. They worked hard and made a life for themselves because this was and still is the land of hope and new beginnings. With that in mind I myself arrived here in New York, 1982. I was illegal for ten years. I was so grateful to be in this country. I was very fortunate. I am a singer and musician and I sang and played in the Irish bars in the Bronx and in the Tri-State. I also did cleaning jobs to make ends meet. However, I was always looking over my shoulder because I was illegal. I heard stories all the time of raids in bars, restaurants and construction sites and of the illegal workers being rounded up and deported. It was so stressful and difficult to be constantly on alert. But there was no work at all for me in Ireland so I had to take my chances here. A relative once told me that I shouldn't be worrying, because I was the right color. I was horrified. Being gay myself I had to hide that because there was a lot of homophobia and racism with the Irish/Irish American community. I can't imagine what the LGBT community who are here illegally deal with today.

When the Morrison Visa lottery came to be it was like a gift from God. With the help of my partner at that time and many friends I got my name drawn in the lottery! I was ecstatic and beyond grateful. I give thanks to Senator Brian Morrison and to The Emerald Isle Immigration Center for all the help they gave to me and to so many immigrants not only from Ireland but from all over the world, with the preparation of paper work and advice on how to prepare for the interviews. However, I did have friends who refused to enter for this lottery because they believed it was a ploy by the government to round up illegals and deport them. Nothing would convince one of my very dear friends. She died a few years later because of an undiagnosed health issue. She was afraid to get treatment because she was an illegal. God be good to her and to all those who died in this sad and tragic way.

Since that time I've become a proud citizen but I will never forget where I came from and the struggles I had to overcome.

Governor Hochul, you, and the members of this committee, you all can be the saviors of this generation of immigrants. You couldn't imagine the feeling of joy and relief that you would give to so many deserving souls by your compassion and generosity.

No one is looking for a handout, just a helping hand up. In that spirit I ask you to support the FEW Coalition's 3B request to extend the Excluded Workers Fund. They deserve this for putting their lives and their families' lives on the line in order to keep the rest of us safe.

Thank you all, Mary Courtney (www.marycourtneymusic.com)