

Good evening,

I'm honored to be here today. Thanks to Americans for Refugees and Immigrants for organizing this amazing event and for allowing me to speak. Thank you to all of you who are here today and care so deeply about immigrants.

My name is Tahmina Watson. I am an attorney with Watson Immigration law in Seattle. I want to talk to you this evening about the executive actions we've been hearing so much about this past week, the remarkable developments overnight, and what all this means for you, your friends, your family and the community.

But before I do that, I think it is important for you to know why I have been asked to speak. I am not only an immigration attorney, but I am also an immigrant to this country. I am the daughter of Bangladeshi parents who immigrated to the United Kingdom, where I was born. I moved to the US in 2005 after I fell in love with the wonderful American who is now my husband and then fell in love with this great country.

I opened my law practice at the height of the recession in 2009. People were being laid off everywhere and those on work visas were desperate for options. The problem wasn't on the scale we are seeing today, but in context, it was huge-

By all measures, my own American dream had come true and I wanted to help others realize theirs, too. But as you all may have heard so many times, our immigration laws are broken for everyone – undocumented immigrants cannot be legalized; many businesses cannot hire the talent they need and families are separated for years, sometimes decades.

All of these issues propelled my advocacy, which 10 years later has included a growing law firm and a book, a weekly talk show and a highly interactive blog, all dedicated to immigration. It even led to being on Hillary Clinton's immigration working group during her campaign. I eat, breathe and sleep immigration law. And that is why I am here.

The America I came to know is a warm and welcoming place. Here, we have freedom of the press. We've had the freedom to speak what we felt, to practice what we believe, regardless of our faith -- constitutional rights that are not available in so many other places in the world. But more recently we've been seeing an erosion of those rights and last week watched as it reached a peak in some of the scariest moments in American history.

President Trump's executive orders on immigration are over reaching and, in many cases, unconstitutional. They are also very cruel. Judges around the country yesterday may have issued Stays on these orders, but Trump's draconian measures still stand. His executive actions will devastate vulnerable immigrant and refugee communities, break families apart, severely restrict the way many foreign-born workers in the US do their jobs, and thus affect American businesses. We have seen people detained in the US, stranded at foreign airports. We are seeing unprecedented chaos and panic on a global scale. Other countries are also now starting to retaliate by denying access to U.S. citizens. How far will this go? Where will it end? Many of my immigration lawyer colleagues have told me this is much worse than anything they saw following 9/11.

Fallout from Trump's three executive orders have been coming at a dizzying pace. We are seeing so much chaos and widespread panic and fear that it's almost impossible to keep pace. No one has all the answers. But I will take you through each one of the president's

executive actions briefly and try to help you understand as best I can what they mean:

1. First is border enforcement. President Trump had been talking about building a wall from the moment he announced his candidacy and his first executive action last week was designed to make good on that promise. At a time when we can't fund our schools, when many in our country can't afford health care, and millions soon may be forced to lose it, when our homeless crisis is at its peak, President Trump is prepared to waste billions of tax payer dollars to erect an unnecessary barrier between two friendly nations.
  - a) This action is sure to curtail due process and increase detention at the border, resulting in asylum seekers, families, children and others being turned away and denied access to the kind of humanitarian protection that for decades had been guaranteed under US laws. Those vulnerable people, many of them fleeing persecution in parts of Central America, will almost certainly be sent back to dangerous, possibly life-threatening circumstances. A wall will not fix our immigration problems. Only comprehensive immigration reform will do that.
2. Interior enforcement action, meanwhile, puts all unauthorized immigrants at risk of deportation, including families, long-time residents, and Dreamers.
  - a) It orders the hiring of 10,000 new ICE officers for enforcement and removal, more than doubling the current staff.
  - b) It prioritizes those who merely committed an act that *could* be charged as a crime, even if they weren't actually charged with anything; OR, they could be suspected of a crime- making every

undocumented immigrant in the United States a priority for removal.

- c) Visa holders who overstay or violate their visas could be deported under the new priority of being a threat to national security and public safety.
- d) And Trump's order compels law enforcement officials in cities like Seattle to enforce immigration laws, by threatening to withhold federal funds to our cities. That wrong-headed move is sure to undermine public safety in our communities by alienating our residents, rather than making our nation more secure.

I'm so proud of Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, Gov. Jay Inslee, our entire congressional delegation including Senators Murray and Cantwell, Representative Pramila Jayapal. Susan Delbene and Adam Smith and others leaders across the state and country who understand that a threat to any of us is a threat to us all and are standing firmly alongside vulnerable communities and against these threats from the administration.

3. And just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, Trump topped the week by signing a third executive order. This one halts all U.S. refugee admissions for four months, bans Syrian refugee admissions indefinitely and bans immigrant and non-immigrant visas processing and entries into the country for nationals of seven predominantly Muslim nations - Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

- a) The order discriminates by country origin when such discrimination was outlawed in the US decades ago.
- b) It goes against the Protocol of the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees.

- c) The order seems to target people of Muslim faith, while prioritizing Christians, as President Trump has admitted. There's never been a religious test for granting refuge to those suffering and in need of our help. There shouldn't be one now.
- d) Refugees and green card holders who were in mid-air when the order was signed were detained at airports across the country yesterday.
- e) While we are grateful to ACLU and NWIRP for obtaining stay orders, they do not cover all issues everywhere.
- f) This morning Homeland Security posted a statement on its website indicating its defiance. We are also hearing that all types of immigrant benefits for people from these 7 countries will be halted -- including citizenship applications, renewal of green cards, applications for work authorization and much more. These are people IN the US and not traveling.
- g) There are another serious concerns. The Executive order calls for a report that will suggest which other countries to include on the ban list. Very soon we will see more countries added here and even more people affected.

As I've said, none of these actions will make our nation safer. Rather, they serve to isolate us, spread fear among us all and leave thousands who face life-threatening danger without protection. They will further separate families, harm American businesses and give a new generation even more reason to dislike this great country. I think it puts us at greater security risk.

1. What we need to do: Unless you are a US citizen, think carefully before you travel. Definitely, if you are from one of those targeted Muslim countries, even if you have a green card, you should not travel at all.

2. If you are a citizen who travels to these countries, be aware you are going to receive scrutiny.
3. If you are eligible for citizenship and you have a clean record, please consider applying now.
4. The administration has spared, for now, recipients of deferred action. If your DACA status is set to expire within soon, see an immigration lawyer immediately.
5. If you are an undocumented, stay vigilant.
6. If you are a visa holder- be careful, do not do anything that could be considered a crime and definitely do not speed, J-walk or anything that you may not consider that serious.
7. If you are a green card holder, absolutely, do not surrender your green card. Ask for a lawyer.

How you can help:

There are so many unanswered questions. Even those of us who have been scouring every release from the White House, haven't figured out all the ways these measures will harm people. I think we are only now beginning to see the devastation.

- Beware of scam artists. At a time of chaos, many will try to prey on the vulnerable. Our Washington State Attorney General Ferguson institute banning the unauthorized practice of law. So be care, find good lawyers- many are here including from NWIRP and ACLU.
- If you have the ability to donate to NWIRP and ACLU, please do. They are working around the clock and have been the saviors in the last 48 hours.
- If you are a business owner, or work for a business- new measures coming down imminently may affect you. You need stand up just like Mark Zuckerberg did today. In our area alone, we have many

of the fortune 500 companies- every one of them needs to stand up and join in to be part of our voice.

- Whatever industry you are in, we must all come together- the tech, the medical, the faith, agriculture, the fishing, the restaurants- let us all be one. Let us be the 12<sup>th</sup> Man for immigration reform!

Many of my immigration lawyer friends and colleagues are here! Please waive if you are an immigration lawyer and be acknowledged!! (hopefully the crowd cheers).

Through the Washington Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, we have formed a new Response Committee. We are here to help our community at a time it needs us most. We are here with you all. Thank you.