

My Country

Today, July 5th, is my 18th Anniversary as an immigrant to this country.

I arrived in Los Angeles on Wednesday, July 5th 2000, extremely nervous and with some degree of apprehension. I had never been to the United States, and like many immigrants, the picture of America was a scary one. Shootings, hate-speech, xenophobic attacks, and a long history of racism and economic disparity.

And yet ...

Give it a chance, I was told.

There are amazing things in America. There are good people, kind people. There are Jewish communities who take care of others. Jewish communities who believe in the common good and protect rights and liberties and values. And they're worth defending and fighting for. And yes, some parts of America are sometimes less safe, but you take precautions and, like in many other countries, you learn where (not) to go at night, or sometimes during the day.



So now I'm a proud U.S. citizen.

And as I watch the fireworks celebrating our independence. I'm deeply grateful to live in a community in which we understand that debate, dissent and discussion are patriotic acts. A community which seeks to protect its poor and weak and vulnerable. I'm proud to have seen hundreds of Jewish organizations – Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, issue-based, synagogues, agencies, and more – sign a [strong letter of principle](#), organized by our Federation partner agency JCPA, to oppose the criminal prosecution of adults who cross the border and of forcing children to be separated from their migrant parents.

And I'm proud to be a colleague to Rabbis and educators and professionals in our Jewish community of Greater MetroWest who have stood up to protect immigrants these past months.

I'm deeply proud of Rabbis Joel Abraham, Faith Joy Dantowitz, Jesse Olitzky, Elliott Tepperman, and Ariann Weitzman, who prayed with their feet in front of immigration authorities and showed their values in action.

I'm deeply grateful to Rabbi Mark Cooper of Oheb Shalom Congregation, who said that “[u]sing children as pawns to force a change in the actions of their parents does not ‘make America safe’. It's simply cruel.”

Inspiring local leaders like Rabbi Matt Gewirtz and Rabbi Alan Silverstein signed on to a [powerful and meaningful statement](#) put together by our friends in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, saying “Families are the foundational element of our society and they must be able to stay together. As persons of faith we oppose this cruel enforcement policy that forcibly separates children from their families. . . . children away from parents who have made a dangerous journey to provide a safe and sufficient life for them is unnecessarily cruel and detrimental to the well-being of the children and their parents. These children have been taken away from their parents, their sole sense of security, with no understanding of just what happened to them, or if they will ever see their family again.”

Cantor Meredith Greenberg of Temple Ner Tamid helped lead an interfaith vigil including several Bloomfield houses of worship on Sunday, June 24. Over 100 people attended.

And I’m thankful that our own Jewish Federation came out with a [clear statement](#) opposing the cruel border policy and calling on our community to call our elected representatives. You can see the statement [here](#).

I don’t forget for a moment how privileged and fortunate I am to live in this country.

When I see the fireworks, I’m mindful of how many have fought for this freedom, and my deep debt to them, and to our community and country. And I’m grateful to all those who continue to stand up for the vulnerable, for the weak, for the children and for the immigrants, who come to these shores to make America truly great.