

DECLARATION OF MARIA [REDACTED] IN SUPPORT OF HER I-192 APPLICATION FOR ADVANCE PERMISSION TO ENTER AS A NON-IMMIGRANT

I, Maria [REDACTED], hereby state under penalty of perjury that the following statements are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, and that I incorporate the following statements into my Application for Advance Permission to Enter as a Non-Immigrant:

1. My name is Maria [REDACTED]. I was born on May [REDACTED], in [REDACTED], Bolivia. I came to the United States on a tourist visa on March [REDACTED] and currently live in an apartment in Annandale, Virginia that is provided to me by the [REDACTED] Transitional Housing Program.
2. I am in the [REDACTED] program because I am a survivor of domestic violence. My husband [REDACTED] physically and emotionally abused me for eight years. He regularly punched me in the head, face, chest, back, stomach and arms. On days when he was wearing his heavy leather boots, he would throw me to the floor – usually by my hair – and repeatedly kick me on my lower back, stomach and head. He would ransack the house, breaking things and threatening to hit or cut me with the shards of glass or remnants of broken furniture. He tried to strangle me with his bare hands.
3. One day, [REDACTED] threw me on our bed, choked me, and hit my face, head and body. The beating lasted for close to three hours. I called the police that day, cooperated with the ensuing investigation and prosecution, and my husband was arrested and ultimately served time in jail for his assault.
4. My husband and his sister [REDACTED] were furious with me for helping the police punish [REDACTED] for his actions. They embarked on a campaign of retaliation, filing several false criminal charges against me, accusing me of extortion and saying threatening things on the telephone. I did not do either of these things, but unfortunately, the police believed [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and I was arrested and sent to jail. I was eligible to be released on a minimal bond, but an immigration detainer kept me in custody. I was eventually cleared of the charges but I was soon charged again, this time for using a false social security number.
5. Unlike the other charges of which I was innocent, I actually did use a social security card that did not belong to me. I received the card from my husband when I first arrived in the United States; he had gotten it from his sister. I only used the card one time, to get a job at [REDACTED] so that I could work and take care of my daughter [REDACTED]. At that time, things between [REDACTED] and I were bad, and I was not receiving any financial support from him, so I had to work to so that [REDACTED] and I could have food and shelter. When I used the card, I did not know that the number belonged to someone else; I thought it was just a made up number and never intended to harm anyone by using it.

6. Because I did commit the crime I was charged for, I took responsibility for my actions and pled guilty. Thankfully, because I did not have a criminal record and because the judge understood that I only used the card to try to help my family, I was given a sentence of time served and released from jail.
7. In total, I spent more than eight months in jail. The hardest thing about being there was being forced to be away from my eight year old daughter [REDACTED], who is the light of my life.
8. [REDACTED] is the most important thing in the world to me. Everything I do, every minute of my day, I think of her first. Her life and her future are what drive me, and I work every day to teach her good values and responsibility so that I can ensure a bright future for my little girl.
9. [REDACTED] goes to [REDACTED] school, a private Catholic school in [REDACTED], Virginia. She was attending public school before, but I chose to enroll her at [REDACTED] because I strongly believe that it is important for her to be close to religion and have a relationship with God. I want her to be taught the right things. The school is strict about values and morals, something that I thought was lacking at [REDACTED]'s old school.
10. [REDACTED] is expensive, but it was imperative for me to have [REDACTED] in a good environment, so I actively sought out financial aid opportunities that would allow her to attend. I worked with the church to apply for financial assistance, and thankfully, [REDACTED] was awarded the aid. Unfortunately, after only one year at the school, [REDACTED] was forced to withdraw, because her father refused to pay his portion of the tuition. I am extremely saddened by my husband's continuing efforts to use our daughter to harm me, and am frustrated that despite doing all I could to give my daughter a better life, I was once again thwarted by his efforts. If I could pay all her tuition, I would do so in a heartbeat and I am continuing to work with the school to find any way to keep her enrolled.
11. Of course, my involvement in [REDACTED]'s school life is not limited to managing the bills. I make sure she gets to and from school as she needs to, so I drive her to school every morning and pick her up every afternoon. I also go to the school to meet with her teachers and principal at least two to three times a month – sometimes if I have extra time in my day I will just pop in to meet with them. I do this because it is important for me to be a very involved parent.
12. Part of the reason that I enrolled [REDACTED] in a Catholic school is because of my own religious beliefs. I was raised as a Catholic and have always practiced the religion faithfully. I have attended [REDACTED] Catholic Church approximately twice a week for many years now.

13. My Catholic beliefs influence every part of my life and everything I think. I strive to feel God with me wherever I go. When I was in jail, God's presence kept me going. I went to mass every Sunday and prayed every night, just like I did when I was at home. I took solace in Christian books, which kept me strong while I was away from my daughter. One author who particularly spoke to me was Joyce Meyer – I read 5 or 6 of her books while I was in jail and when I had read all ones in the library at my jail, I requested more from other libraries.
14. Another source of great strength for me is my family that lives with me here in the United States. My maternal aunt, uncle and cousins live near me in Virginia and have been unwavering in their support of me during all the difficult times I have had to endure in the past year. They have been a wonderful family to [REDACTED] as well – not only making sure that she was able to contact and visit me while I was in jail, but taking care of her while I was away as well. In addition, my grandmother and sister who live in Florida have also been very helpful to me in my time in the U.S.
15. My family was particularly supportive when I arrived in the United States in February [REDACTED], only a few months after my eighteenth birthday. I did not speak English at that time, although I learned very quickly. I took English classes when I first arrived and improved rapidly once I began working to support my daughter.
16. Speaking the language of this country is very important to me. As part of my contract with the [REDACTED] Transitional Housing Program, I took ESL classes to further improve my English skills. I attended classes Monday through Friday mornings. I tested into the highest level ESL class when I first arrived, and in October, I passed the final test and graduated from the ESL program.
17. Though [REDACTED], I am also working on getting my G.E.D. I attend classes on Monday and Wednesday afternoons and have homework for the class almost every night. A few months ago, I passed the G.E.D. pretest and am very optimistic about my ability to get my G.E.D. soon.
18. Once I get my G.E.D., and if I am granted a work permit, I would like to return to Staples, where I worked before I was arrested. I was a good employee there and I am sure that they would hire me back. I was very proud to work at Staples – at the time I was a single mother working hard to support my daughter because I received no help from her father. It was incredibly rewarding to be able to provide for my family. I was also glad that I was able to pay taxes to the country that had given me so much.
19. Another reason that I would like to work at [REDACTED] again is because the company offers very generous benefits that would help both me and my daughter in the future. Specifically, the company will help me go to college. I would like to go to college to study either business or physical therapy.

20. It would be devastating to both me and my daughter if I had to return to Bolivia. [REDACTED] is a U.S. citizen; she was born in this country and has never been to Bolivia. Although I try to teach her as much Spanish as I can, she speaks very little Spanish. I would estimate that she speaks only about 30% Spanish.
21. Bolivia is dangerous place for women and children and [REDACTED] would be extremely scared if she had to go to this new and strange place. It would be incredibly difficult for her to adjust, not only because of her lack of language skills, but because she has spent her entire life in the United States and her life in Bolivia would be completely different. I remember feeling lost when I first came to the U.S. and I can't imagine what that experience would be like for a young child.
22. The only thing worse than [REDACTED] and I returning to Bolivia would be if I returned and [REDACTED] had to stay here. I simply could not bear to be apart from my daughter again.
23. It was so hard for [REDACTED] to be apart from me when I was in jail. She visited every other weekend and called twice a week but it was just not the same as seeing her face-to-face. I know she tried to be brave when she called or saw me, but I notice the difference now that I am out of jail and am able to be with her on a regular basis. I can see my real daughter, an excited and animated little girl. She is much more exuberant and happy now. One day, she was bouncing around the room (like she is prone to doing) and I asked her why she was acting so silly. "My heart is happy to be with you again mommy," she replied.
24. I am currently involved in a custody dispute with [REDACTED]'s father. We attended a hearing at the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court on July [REDACTED], but there was not enough time for the Judge to hear all the evidence, so the case was continued to December [REDACTED]. I hope [REDACTED] and I are able to resolve our differences, because I think it would be better for my daughter to be with both her mom and dad, but it would be catastrophic for me to leave before the custody issue is resolved, as it may limit my ability to see [REDACTED] in the future.
25. Lastly, I am afraid to return to Bolivia because I do not have the legal protections there that I have here in the United States. In the past year, my husband and his sister have clearly demonstrated that they are willing to go to great lengths to hurt me. My husband has not only physically abused me, but has attempted to use the legal system to punish me as well. Fortunately, justice has prevailed and he has not succeeded.
26. I don't think I would be so lucky in Bolivia. In May, my husband's sister [REDACTED] went to Bolivia and told a court there that my husband and I were never legally married. She accused me of falsifying legal documents here in the United States, which is not true. I am certain that I would be arrested on these false charges if I

returned to Bolivia and fear that I would not be able to prove my innocence of my husband's vindictive charges like I was able to do here in the United States.

27. It would be so much easier for my husband and his family to hurt me in Bolivia. I fear that they would not only use official processes to try to hurt me, but that they would simply pay someone to kill me. It would be easy for them to do that there, unlike here in the United States where they are scared to do something so drastic because they know that there are people here who will stand up for me, and for the truth.

I thank you for considering my application and respectfully ask that you approve my Application for Advance Permission to Enter as a Non-Immigrant.

Signed under the pains and penalties of perjury.

Maria [REDACTED] Date