

## Jeanette Vizguerra Speaks at MSJ Organized People's Mic



Jeanette Vizguerra, mother of four, immigration reform activist and illegal immigrant, was recently named one of Time Magazine's [100 most influential people](#) in the world. She is currently taking sanctuary in the First Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado as she is marked for deportation by I.C.E. despite her numerous attempts to gain citizenship. On May 9 Vizguerra spoke at the church in a People's Mic organized by the University of Denver's Multicultural Social Justice Student Organization (MSJ).

Vizguerra told the story of her long and arduous battle to stay in the United States. "It has not been easy, it has been very hard," she said at the open mic. Her journey began in 1997 when she entered the country illegally for the first time. During her time in the country, she married and had three children, one of whom, Roberto, describes himself as her '[voice](#)' outside of the church. Vizguerra's battle to stay in the country has everything to do with her family. She wants a better education for them, a point she could not stress enough in her lecture on Tuesday. Her three youngest children are American citizens while her eldest, Tania Baez, has a work permit the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Baez is a preschool teacher and has three children of her own.

But Vizguerra has been fighting the immigration system for a long time. After her first entry into the United States, she left to visit her dying mother back in Mexico. She describes this choice as difficult, but necessary. She left her infant child in the States and was heartbroken to leave, but said she would have regretted not seeing her mother for the rest of her life. Upon arriving in Mexico, she found re-entering the states legally to be impossible. Vizguerra attempted to cross the border illegally and wound up in a detention center in Texas. Her situation at the center was precarious: she was in the US illegally, but she had hired a lawyer before her return to Mexico who was fighting for her freedom. Vizguerra remained in the detention center for three months,

in a place she described as lacking in basic medical care and amenities. Hours before she was scheduled for deportation, her lawyer succeeded in bringing her back to Colorado. But her fight was far from over.

During her 20 year battle to stay in the United States, Vizguerra worked as a [janitor and union organizer](#) and later owned a moving and cleaning business. In 2009 she was caught with false identification that allowed her to find work. “It is important that the documents were fake, not stolen,” she explained. “I never stole someone’s identity.” She pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor, setting off a chain of events that eventually led to a deportation order. Under the Obama administration, Vizguerra was not fearful as immigration officials focused on deporting those who had committed serious crimes. But that changed when Trump took office. The night before Vizguerra was scheduled to report to immigration authorities for a check-in, she had an intuition that she would be marked for deportation. This intuition proved to be correct and Vizguerra took shelter in the First Baptist Church.

Time Magazine named Vizguerra one of its most influential people because not only is she an advocate, but she is placing herself at the center of a volatile political maelstrom. She continues to speak to reporters and to publicly acknowledge her own precarious position even as she advocates for the safety of others. While listening to Vizguerra, it is impossible not to be moved by her obvious compassion for her children and her struggle to remain in the United States. In her speech, Vizguerra was certain to advocate for other immigrants. She emphasized that immigrants in the United States do not take benefits or jobs from American citizens and that the current administration is spreading falsehoods. She encouraged the audience to take action by writing letters to local representatives to extend sanctuary protections to the courthouses so immigrants can advocate for themselves without fearing the I.C.E agents who have publicly acknowledged their ability to arrest those at the courthouses.

Jeanette Vizguerra is not an illegal immigrant who needs to be deported. She is a mother and grandmother, she is an activist, and she has fought long and hard so her children can receive a good education. After fighting for 20 years, she deserves to feel safe in the United States so she can go home to her children.