

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2004

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge:

We are writing regarding the case of Maria Suarez (Alien # 36640042), whose removal order is pending before the Executive Office of Immigration Review in San Pedro, California. We urge you to give every careful consideration to the case of Ms. Suarez, a trafficking victim and domestic violence survivor.

Ms. Suarez entered the U.S. legally from Mexico at the age of 16. Two weeks later she was lured from her home by an unknown woman and sold to Anselmo Covarrubias for \$200. For five years, Covarrubias enslaved Suarez and repeatedly raped, battered, and tortured her.

In 1981, Covarrubias was killed by a man who rented one of his houses, and the killer and his wife implicated Ms. Suarez in the crime. Suarez was convicted of conspiracy to commit the murder. The killer and his wife later admitted that Ms. Suarez was not involved in the murder. In addition, the attorney that represented Ms. Suarez was disbarred after the trial and has since admitted that he completely misrepresented her.

While in prison, Maria earned her GED, enrolled in college-level courses, and contributed to numerous volunteer programs. Two decades after her incarceration, the Board of Prison Terms (BPT) determined that Ms. Suarez was the victim of extreme violence, abuse, and torture at the hands of Covarrubias and recommended her release. They called Ms. Suarez's case "one of the most egregious instances of Battered Woman Syndrome that [the BPT has] ever investigated." Unfortunately, evidence of battering and its effects were not allowed into evidence at the time of Ms. Suarez's trial.

Based on the BPT's findings, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger granted Ms. Suarez parole on December 16, 2003. However, immigration laws were amended in 1996 to provide for the deportation of long-term legal permanent residents who had been convicted of crime. As a consequence, persons wrongly convicted of a crime in America must still be deported, despite their innocence. However, it is our understanding that the United States Department of Homeland Security has the authority to dismiss removal proceedings under certain compelling circumstances. In this regard, we urge you to allow Ms. Suarez to remain in the United States with her family.

The United States is a beacon of light around the world because of its commitment to human rights. In keeping with this commitment, we should give immigrant survivors of domestic violence and trafficking victims a genuine opportunity to explain their

circumstances before federal authorities. Failure to take such action could send a wrong message around the world about the United States' commitment to combat domestic violence and trafficking.

After reviewing her record, we trust that you, too, will find Ms. Suarez's case to be tragic. Again, we urge you to give every careful consideration to her case.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



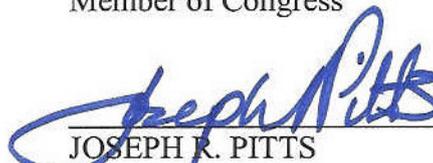
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Member of Congress



SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO
Member of Congress



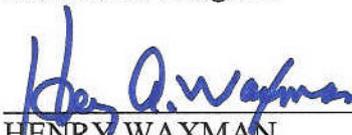
LOUISE MCINTOSH SLAUGHTER
Member of Congress



JOSEPH R. PITTS
Member of Congress



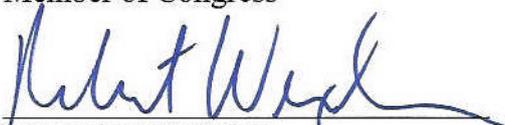
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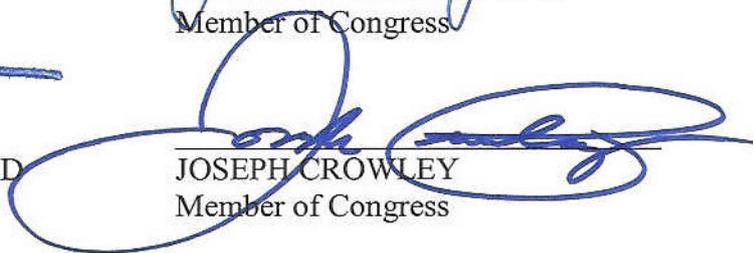
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