



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Broken Immigration Laws Drive North Carolina Father Out of Country, Separating Him from U.S. Citizen Wife and Two Daughters

Jenni Rivera, a Raleigh math teacher, watched Fidel, her husband of 17 years and best friend, board a plane to Mexico today after immigration laws left their family with no option but separation.

October 13, 2025. Raleigh, North Carolina. — American Families United (AFU) member Jenni Rivera, a public school math teacher, watched her husband Fidel Rivera board a flight back to Mexico today. After 30 years in the United States and 17 years of marriage, Fidel made the painful decision to self-deport, leaving behind his U.S. citizen wife and daughters Mackenzie (17) and Isabella (15), rather than continue living under the constant fear of detention and deportation.

The decision was not easy, but the Rivera family felt they had no other option. “It’s not about me—it’s about my family,” Fidel said. “My wife and my daughters are U.S. citizens. I just want the best for them. Every father should be able to be with his family.”

“Fidel is an amazing human being,” Jenni said. “I didn’t want to see him get arrested and held in a detention center, knowing what goes on inside those places. If they broke his spirit or if he came out different, I just couldn’t live with myself.”

Like 1.4 million other mixed-status couples in the United States, the Rivera family has lived with the reality that marrying a citizen does not automatically provide a pathway to legal status, leaving families trapped between living in fear or living apart.

“We lived in a box for so long. Every decision we made was shaped by fear that Fidel might be taken away,” Jenni explained. The recent immigration enforcement surge placed unbearable pressure on the family. “We couldn’t keep living under that anxiety. It was destroying my health, and I wasn’t going to let it rob me of the years I have left to enjoy life.”

What Fidel Will Miss Most

For Fidel, the hardest part of leaving is missing everyday moments with his daughters—especially their soccer games. “What I’ll miss most are soccer games with my kids. This is where I got my peace,” Fidel said. “At the games I don’t think about problems from work, I don’t think about what I need to fix around the house. I just watch my daughters play and it’s like I’m on another planet. That is what I’m going to miss most.”

Both Mackenzie and Isabella play soccer, and their father could always be seen in the stands. He was well-known among parents and players for cheering from the bleachers and blowing his horn to motivate the team or celebrate a win.

“He never missed a game,” Mackenzie said. “He would always drive me to my games. Now I have to drive myself to my games, and Isabella and I, we’ll have to attend each other’s games instead of dad being there.”

Economic Impact of Family Separation

Fidel worked for the past 17 years as a well-respected electrician for a company near Raleigh, one of the fastest-growing cities in the country. Jenni is an experienced math teacher at a time when math teachers are in critically short supply nationwide.

Although Fidel's wife and daughters will remain in the United States for now, Jenni is already planning to take an early retirement so she can leave the country and be with her husband.

"I'm going to take my entire retirement income and I'm going to walk out of this country and spend it somewhere else. We'll sell this house and buy something else—and it's not going to be here," Jenni said. "The United States is losing money on families like ours. That doesn't make sense."

Looking Ahead

As Jenni prepares for life without her husband, the loss feels overwhelming. "He's my best friend—the person I want to tell everything to. Now I'll wake up without having him to share coffee with, come home without having him to share dinner with, and go to bed without having him to talk to," she said.

Fidel echoed the injustice of the situation: "Trump said he wants to help U.S. citizens. My wife is a U.S. citizen. My daughters are U.S. citizens. What is he going to do for them?"

Jenni, who is on the leadership team at American Families United, plans to continue advocating for policy change even as her own family separates. "I'm going to continue to fight and advocate because what's happening isn't okay. It's not okay for any family to have to go through this," she said.

Ashley De Azevedo, Executive Director of American Families United, said "We are watching, in real time, the deep heartbreak of two young daughters forced to say goodbye to their father, not because of a crime, but because their family made the impossible choice to avoid indefinite detention in cruel facilities like Alligator Alcatraz." American Families United represents mixed-status couples like Jenni and Fidel across the country who are facing similarly difficult choices.

"When a North Carolina schoolteacher has to choose between her country and her husband, something in our nation's moral compass is broken," Ashley added. "No American family should be forced apart to preserve their dignity. Family should never be collateral damage of politics, not in the country that promises liberty and justice for all."

American Families United supports mixed-status couples across the country in the hopes that U.S. citizens and their immigrant spouses can live together in the country they all love.

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