



## Immigrant Crime Victims Feel Used By Pro-Trump Group

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June 1, 2017

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump often brought family members of people killed by undocumented immigrants on stage at his rallies, but now many of those families say they feel used.

Houston-based charity The Remembrance Project worked with the Trump campaign to arrange for the family members to appear at Trump rallies, in campaign ads, and at the Republican National Convention. Some of the female members of the group called themselves "Angel Moms" and wore branded T-shirts.

According to Politico, over 12 victims' families that were involved with The Remembrance Project are accusing the nonprofit group of not helping them financially.

The basic premise of The Remembrance Project and Trump's campaign was how dangerous undocumented immigrants are, but The Hill reported in March on two studies that seemed to contradict that assertion.

*It turns out President Trump's budget has \$2 trillion error in it:*

The Sentencing Project, a criminal justice research group, did a study that found "foreign-born residents of the United States commit crime less often than native-born citizens." The Cato Institute noted in a separate study that "all immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than natives relative to their shares of the population."

Brenda Sparks, whose son Eric Zepeda was killed in 2011 by a car driven by an undocumented immigrant, told Politico: "Trump used The Remembrance Project to get to us, and The Remembrance Project also used him."

The news site notes that Trump spoke at a Remembrance Project fundraiser in Houston that charged attendees as much as \$10,000 per table. The Remembrance Project asserted that the money would "sponsor a stolen life," and thanked those who donated the big bucks for "support and contributions made that assists an #AngelFamily."

But some of the families say they never received any direct help from The Remembrance Project.

The family members blame Maria Espinoza, who co-founded The Remembrance Project, because they believe she used them to get to Trump and increase her own status.

Maureen Maloney, whose son Matthew Denice was killed in a 2011 by a drunk driver from Ecuador, recalled her days with The Remembrance Project:

As Trump became more popular, [Espinoza] started wanting more of a public presence. The more involved I got, once I got past my son's trial and could focus more on the organization, it just seemed like my values and my goals were different than what Maria's were. It started to feel like this might be a stepping stone for her.

Espinoza has said she may run for a Houston congressional seat in 2018. She has support from Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist in the White House, who reportedly told her "we're going to have your back" and praised The Remembrance Project as "an amazing organization."

The Remembrance Project told the IRS in a tax exemption request that it would "refrain from supporting or opposing candidates in political campaigns in any way" or "attempt to influence legislation."

The White House press office would not comment to Politico, but Espinoza said: "My motives are to be able to save other lives from being stolen because of illegal immigration. That's our mission."

She referred to the complaints of the families as "some sour grapes."

Angie Morfin-Vargas, whose 13-year-old son Ruben was killed by an undocumented immigrant in 1990, recalled being at a Trump rally: "I felt it in my heart that Mr. Trump was sincere."

Morfin-Vargas had a change of heart by the time the Houston fundraiser for The Remembrance Project rolled around: "I sort of felt like we were just a dog and pony show on stage for all the people in the audience who were donors, and who weren't victims."

Politico reviewed internal Remembrance Project records that showed at least \$52,000 worth of tickets were sold for the fundraiser.

Many donors and victims' families said Espinoza gave them the very strong impression that the money would be used, in part, to help the families with counseling, legal help, medical care and other costs.

An unidentified family member said: "Maria would always find the right words to keep me hanging on with the hope for some help that never came."

The family member recalled that Espinoza recommended that Remembrance Project families create a GoFundMe page to help another family's medical costs.

Texas Republican activist Kathleen Lieberman, who was one of the donors, said: "[W]e believed that the money after the dinner was going to help the families, and I was very disappointed to find out that it didn't."

Espinoza denied telling family members or donors that The Remembrance Project would financially help with the families' medical, legal or counseling bills:

We do not do that. We're going to roll out a couple new ... initiatives and collaborations that are so needed and I think it will help the families directly, because we certainly don't have the funding to do that. I wish we did.