

Statement of Rudy Perez
Before the Federal Commission on School Safety
"Proactively Protecting Our Schools"
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
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Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to share the story of my American dream come true. My name is Detective Rudy Perez, and I am a 16-year veteran of the Los Angeles School Police Department. I'd like to start by saying that the USA machine works. This country offers hope, opportunity, and most of all safety. My story shows that people have the ability to come here and become a productive and contributing member of this country.

I emigrated from Guatemala when I was a young child. My mom and dad said that it was not safe for us in Guatemala because of the prevailing gang violence and the rise of violent crimes. We immigrated to the United States, and through the process of hard work and dedication of my mother and father, we became citizens of an amazing country.

Living in government housing for the first fifteen years was not easy because of the intense gangs, violence and drug usage in the area. Shots were fired regularly and there was temptation to join the gangs surrounding us. For me, school was difficult; I was diagnosed with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. I didn't learn to read until I was in fifth grade which continued to make the education process very hard for me.

Despite the fact that we were surrounded by negativity and violence, we were still better off than our previous circumstances. My mom always reminded us that there was a difference between being poor in Guatemala and being poor in the United States with resources. In the United States, you can call 911, and the authorities will respond. It is a country of laws and safety, and people care for each other.

As I focused my attention to pass high school, I was still affected by the violence around me. That's when Victor Del Rio, our school resource officer, stepped into my life and had a stern talk with me. He told me that I was a likeable guy, but he was concerned that I was skipping class to hang out with friends that could negatively affect my long-term future. In that moment, I chose to trust him and his judgement which led to Officer Del Rio becoming my mentor. His guidance changed my life. Through our many one-on-one conversations, we walked through in-depth life questions that helped get my priorities straight.

When I was in elementary school, law enforcement officers were my heroes. But it was in high school where one of these officers became a real friend and someone I could turn to. Because of him, my parents' first encounter with US law enforcement was positive.

I saw Victor act as both a warrior and a guardian. We experienced many lockdowns and shootings, and he would always run toward the danger. He was a true hero. I'll never forget the day he pulled me aside when he found out that I'd be graduating and said "you made it, and you made it on your own merits."

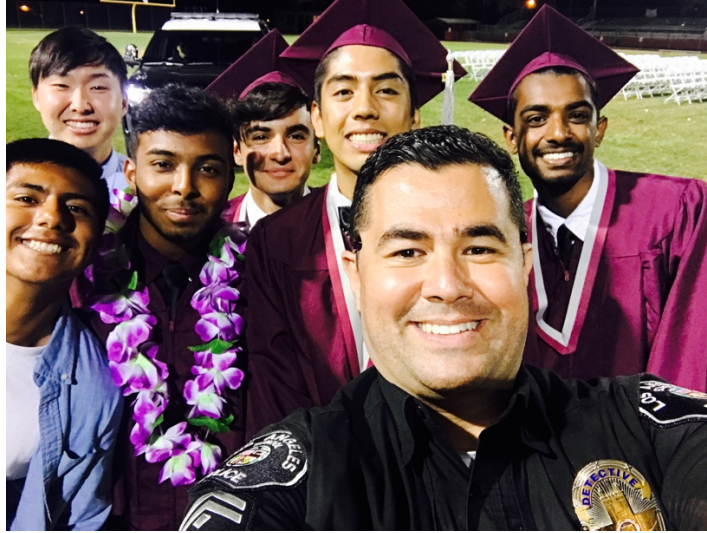
Victor connected me with a youth program that helped me to get a good-paying job with the City of Los Angeles. I became a lifeguard for eight years, but by the time I was 21, I wanted to do something more with my life. I called the LAPD and asked how I could become an officer in a high school. I found out that there was a whole division for that, and my dream became being a school police officer and giving back in the way that Victor had given to me. I graduated from the Police Academy and went straight to work for the Los Angeles School Police Department where I have been an officer for sixteen years.

I now know former students who are serving their communities in a variety of roles, as firemen, clergy, office managers, and so much more. Through my experience, I was able to start Friends of Safe Schools USA, a non-profit that is about serving communities by connecting law enforcement and students. The officers involved gave four tons of food last Thanksgiving and thousands of dollars' worth of backpacks. I also recently became the Vice President of the National School Resource Officers' Association. And formally served as the President and then Vice President of the Los Angeles School Police Officers' Association which represents 500 school police officers.

My father's greatest advice was that I must become a "history maker" so that the footprint I leave may lead others to a path of success. It is my job to mentor, protect, and lead the students safely into graduation. I work for the Los Angeles Unified School District that serves 700,000 students. I have experience working on difficult campuses that are located in the center of high volatile areas. Many students are still getting themselves into trouble, but there are even more that are crossing the graduation stage. And that is because the SRO has the ability to empathize with students, staff and community members. He engages in diversion and restorative justice programs. Alongside the school administration, the resource officer helps find a solution of compromise to benefit the students. Because we believe in helping kids grow, we take time to assess each situation to decide when social or mental health services are needed rather than incarceration.

It takes not a village but a country. The American dream is possible for our students if our SROs are properly selected, properly trained and properly equipped to work with the students and lead them into graduation safely. Education is the key to becoming a productive member of society. School resource officers help make that happen.

Education must be first. Education MUST be first.... And safety always. Thank you



We mentor, protect and lead students safely into graduations!