

Maria Ortega

2023 Advocacy Fellows Reflection

Working as a BT advocacy fellow, I had the opportunity to learn about bills and how they are introduced. I was able to see how important it is for people to participate with what's going on in the Capitol and put their voices out there. I learned to share my voice through written testimony. It is very important to have a wide diversity of opinions when hearings are going on because it's important to include everyone's input on these issues. The most marginalized voices are the ones that have to be out there because these are the people who are often most negatively impacted. Through my own participation in the fellowship during this regular session, I learned that my voice matters and I felt very supported by Will and Victoria. I learned from them that I was not alone in this battle and that we are all in this together. Someone once told me to lean on my community and rise because one voice might not have a huge impact but with all our voices we have, we can and we will.

To continue my growth as an advocate following this experience, I will keep spreading awareness and knowledge to my community and getting involved in many forms of activism work as I have been doing since high school. This looks like getting involved in similar organizations like BT to continue to navigate my path as an activist and social justice advocate throughout my college years and into my future career as an attorney. I believe it is important for all of us to always keep growing as individuals. Through time and experiences, we gain knowledge and skills that keep creating a greater impact. I aim to obtain the most education and leadership skills possible in order to be able to later on create bigger movements that support and grow power amongst vulnerable communities.

I think that advocacy work can be hard sometimes because it's not a tangible thing that we can show, like an engineer showing a final prototype, and so it can be a challenging path. There is progress being made and slowly we are reforming and thriving for a better future and change. At the same time, this work requires something that I would say is consistently still missing in many policymaking spaces — the consideration of diverse groups, not just the wealthy and privileged.