

Testimony of Jonah Ramirez

**Youth Community Member from Southern California
In Support of S.1499 - *Marine Vessel Emissions Reduction Act of 2007*
Presented to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
February 14, 2008 - Washington D.C.**

Good morning. First of all, I would like to thank Senator Boxer for inviting me here to speak to you today. Anytime the Senator invites you to speak at her Hearing, it is quite an honor, but it is even more so when you're a sixth grader!!

Today I am here to testify not as a twelve-year-old boy but as a victim; a victim of pollution. A victim of the air I breathe. A young boy who has been forced to grow up way too fast. I have asthma. I wasn't born with it; I developed it. I developed asthma by breathing dirty air. You see, the place I call home, the place where I have always felt safe, felt free to run around, play and be myself, received failing grades last year in almost all categories in the American Lung Association's State of the Air Report. With this said, I believe it is fair to state the laws we have now, the laws that we believe protect us, are way too lenient. Our current laws permit heavy exhaust, smoke and debris to be considered "safe." Safe? If these particles that I breathe every day are safe, then why do I depend on daily medication and the fast relief of my inhaler to do something that everyone has the right to do? **Breathe.**

I live in San Bernardino County, but at the ports, large ships from other countries come in and are the largest unregulated sources of pollutants in

southern California. Why? The high level of sulfur in the marine fuels causes ships to produce over half of the sulfur oxides pollution in Southern California – that’s one of the major components of soot and smog. Then it blows across to where I live and **I can’t breathe.**

When I was younger, I played with G.I. Joes. Most boys do. Well, a boy in New Jersey or Georgia or even here in Washington D. C. will pay about \$17 for a G.I. Joe shipped from China. But the cost to me is much higher. Because of all of the soot and smog pollution blowing across Southern California, I pay with my health.

Since I developed asthma, I have learned a lot about the air we all breathe. I have learned that we **all** need to do something because our air is making us sick. Breathing is a common bond we share; something we all do. It should not be something we have to think about, but the reality is, some of us do need to think about it. We need to change the way we see air quality. It is not just a topic on the news. It is affecting all of us. Our dirty air is shortening our lives. It is shortening the lives of our children. Nearly 5 million Californians suffer from asthma. **5 million.**

Over the past 5 years, I have testified at the AQMD urging lawmakers to change laws regarding air quality. I have testified at an EPA Hearing in San Francisco and, more recently, one in Los Angeles asking legislators to make drastic changes in the laws regarding air quality. I have spoken to the press on numerous occasions expressing my concern for people, especially children, all over the world who are forced to breathe such polluted air. I have appeared on TV twice sharing my knowledge of asthma and air quality

and the relationship that, **unfortunately**, they share. Last April, I introduced our Governor at the Small World Asthma Conference at Disneyland, California. Now today, I speak to you at the same hearing as Senator Barbara Boxer.

Look at me. I am a face of asthma.... But not just asthma. I have become the face of the asthma/ air quality relationship. I am the face of our future. Our future **if** our laws remain unchanged. I am a direct product of our environment. An environment that we helped create and now we need to repair – with your help.

Everyone of us needs to take steps to reduce air pollution. I have and I am twelve. **Together, let's make my dream of breathing clean, pollution-free air a reality. Please support us by approving the Marine Vessel bill by Senator Boxer.**

I thank you, from the bottom of my lungs.