

We Cannot Afford Not to Pass the DREAM Act: A Plea from America's Scholars

In the last days of this year's Congress our lawmakers have the opportunity to pass some form of immigration reform. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act is a federal bill aimed at providing immigration relief to undocumented students. The passage of this bill would grant as many as [1.9 million youth](#) access to legal residency and limited forms of federal financial aid -- thus removing legal and economic barriers to higher education and increasing the likelihood that these youth have the chance to become full, contributing, members of our society.

In the recent weeks and months the DREAM Act has received key endorsements from President Obama, members of his Cabinet, the business community, organized labor, and educators. In fact, the education community has come out strongly in favor of the bill, as at least 29 higher education associations -- including the College Board and the United Students Association -- and presidents and chancellors at more than 73 colleges and universities across the U.S. have endorsed it.

We, a group of university professors who study immigration and the circumstances confronting these young people, and who have many of these students in our classes, believe passing the DREAM Act is the right thing to do for our nation's immediate interests and for our long term security.

After decades of research it is clear that, by punishing the children of undocumented immigrants, this country is creating a disenfranchised group of young people cut off from the very mechanisms that would allow them to contribute to our economy and society. Policies currently in place have presumed that making life harder would make immigrants go home; this is referred to as "attrition through enforcement." Yet, this has not happened. To the contrary, Congress' failure to pass immigration reform is creating a permanent underclass of marginalized, poorly educated, and low-skilled individuals, surviving in the shadows of society and facing overwhelming economic and social burdens. It is especially troubling and wasteful that some 1.9 million unauthorized children, American in spirit but not in law, are now enrolled in U.S. schools but will not be able to lawfully gain employment at the end of their education.

Over these last weeks and months we have seen our own students -- those who are in our classrooms -- struggle to meet school expenses, graduate from our universities, and then face uncertain futures and the constant risk of deportation. But we have also witnessed their incredible capacity to thrive despite debilitating circumstances. Gaby Pacheco, who, along with 3 others walked from Miami to Washington DC, holds three degrees from Miami Dade College. She dreams of practicing music therapy with autistic children. While her undocumented status keeps her from achieving those dreams, she has not given up. In the face of opposition she has invited dialogue with those who disagree with her. In fact, she embraces these opportunities. Literally. This past June, upon meeting Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, she hugged him. Gaby has lived in the US since she was seven. She loves this country -- her country, the only country she has ever really known -- as much as any of us. What is to be gained from limiting her opportunities?

Critics claim the DREAM Act would undermine the rule of law. Yet, we are reminded of Chief Justice Earl Warren's habit of asking "Is it fair?" in deciding big cases. Gaby Pacheco and the millions like her did not choose to violate the law, nor are they responsible for the mess that is our immigration system. Is it fair to sentence these youth to lives in the shadows for having been brought to the U.S. as babies by their parents? We think America is better than this. We can fix this upside-down moral universe by making a down payment on immigration reform, and passing the DREAM Act. It is an important step in fixing America's broken immigration system, and it should be passed. U.S. raised children, like Gaby Pacheco, who benefit from the DREAM Act will see their hard work rewarded and, in turn, will contribute even more to the U.S., through higher earnings and taxes paid. And they will be our future teachers, community leaders, and professionals. As we think of students like Gaby Pacheco and the

impact they are currently making, let us imagine the potential impact -- and multiply it by 1.9 million. The America that we believe in, and that these idealistic youth believe in, would pass the DREAM Act.

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