

CHILDREN'S ADVOCATES SUPPORT THE DREAM ACT

April 22, 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the undersigned children's advocacy organizations, we write in strong support of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act which was introduced in the Senate and House on March 26th, as S.729 and H.R.1751 respectively. We urge your co-sponsorship of this important legislation.

The DREAM Act is a bipartisan proposal which would provide undocumented immigrant youth in the United States with conditional residency and a pathway to citizenship provided they came here before the age of 16 and maintained continuous residence for 5 years, graduate from high school or obtain a GED, attend 2 years of college or join the military, and have no criminal records. Each year, approximately 65,000 talented students graduate from American high schools and find their dreams of college deferred due to their immigration status. These children desperately desire an opportunity to pursue higher education and contribute to the United States, the only home many of them have ever known. Through no fault of their own, DREAM students were brought to our country at a young age. They have grown up in our communities, excelled in our schools and like their native-born peers, consider themselves the future doctors, soldiers, teachers, and engineers that will resolve the many challenges we face as a nation today.

In addition, this legislation would make it easier for states to decide whether or not to offer immigrant students in-state tuition rates, instead of much higher out of state tuition rates. While most states do not bar immigrant students from enrollment in their institutions of higher education, the steeper tuition costs can effectively put enrollment in public colleges out of reach. Eleven states have passed laws allowing immigrant students to access higher education at their in-state tuition rates. However, federal laws erect barriers that make it difficult for many more states to take such action.

Since the DREAM Act was first introduced in 2001, thousands of hardworking, immigrant students have been denied the opportunity to pursue a college education and contribute socially and economically to our nation. If Congress fails to act this year, thousands more children will find themselves shut out of postsecondary education. Our immigration law currently has no mechanism to consider the special circumstances of these students. The DREAM Act is a modest, common sense solution for this very select group of promising, immigrant students.

As organizations committed to the ideals that our children represent the best of our hope and aspirations for a better today and tomorrow, we urge you to cosponsor the DREAM

Act and support its swift passage in Congress. To this end, please contact the offices of Senators Richard Durbin or Richard Lugar in the Senate or Representatives Howard Berman or Lincoln Diaz-Balart in the House of Representatives.

On behalf of:

Action for Children North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina
Agenda for Children, New Orleans, Louisiana
Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Little Rock, Arkansas
Association for Children of New Jersey, Newark, New Jersey
Center for Law and Social Policy, Washington, DC
Center for Public Policy Priorities, Austin, Texas
Child and Family Policy Center, Des Moines, Iowa
Children's Alliance of New Hampshire, Concord, New Hampshire
Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC
Colorado Children's Campaign, Denver Colorado
Family Resource Center of Northeast Mississippi, Tupelo, Mississippi
Family Voices, Washington, DC
Foster Care Alumni of America, Alexandria, Virginia
First Focus, Washington DC
First Star, Washington, DC
Maine Children's Alliance, Augusta, Maine
Metro Organizations for People, Denver, Colorado
Michigan's Children, Lansing, Michigan
Mississippi Center for Justice, Jackson, Mississippi
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Washington, DC
National Collaboration for Youth, Washington, DC
National Foster Care Coalition, Washington, DC
New Mexico Voices for Children, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Public Citizens for Children and Youth, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Providence, Rhode Island
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Illinois
SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center, Columbia, South Carolina
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Albany New York
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, Newark, New Jersey
Voices for America's Children, Washington, DC
Voices for Ohio's Children, Columbus, Ohio
Voices for Utah's Children, Salt Lake City, Utah
Voices for Vermont's Children, Montpelier, Vermont
Voices for Virginia's Children, Richmond, Virginia