



**STATEMENT OF
BRUCE LESLEY
PRESIDENT
FIRST FOCUS CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND BORDER SECURITY**

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

UNITED STATES SENATE

AT A HEARING ENTITLED

“S. 952, DEVELOPMENT, RELIEF, AND EDUCATION FOR ALIEN MINORS

(DREAM) ACT OF 2011”

PRESENTED

JUNE 28, 2011

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cornyn, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement regarding the June 28th hearing on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a bipartisan children’s advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Too often, innocent children pay the price for our broken immigration policies, including the nearly 1 million undocumented children under the age of 18 currently growing up in our country. These are children that have grown up speaking English, pledge allegiance to our flag, and aspire to be our country’s future engineers, teachers, and doctors. We firmly believe that the DREAM Act is a common sense solution for addressing the plight of these young people by providing them with the opportunity to earn their legal status if they came to the U.S. as children, have good moral character, finish high school or obtain a GED, and complete two years of college or military service.

As advocates for children, we believe that every single child should have access to the supports needed to grow and thrive. In the 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* case, the Supreme Court ruled that all children, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to a public K-12 education. The *Plyler* statute, which we also strongly support, is rooted in the American value of equality as well as the belief that children should not be punished for the actions of their parents. Yet nearly 65,000 immigrant youth graduate from our high schools every year only to face significant barriers to a higher education and no legal means by which to join the workforce. These students, many who come from low-income families, lack access to many forms of state and federal financial aid and are often ineligible for in-state tuition. Recognizing the importance of investing in these students, twelve

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states have already taken steps to pass legislation to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students residing in their state. However, passage of the DREAM Act at the federal level is ultimately needed to allow these bright young students to become fully contributing members of society.

In addition to facing an uncertain future, these young people also must live in constant fear of being separated from their families and deported to a country they often no longer remember. It simply makes no sense to deport thousands of innocent youth who have worked hard and want nothing more than to give back to the country they call home. Recently, John Morton, Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), issued guidance with regards to the use of prosecutorial discretion. This guidance specifically identifies “individuals present in the United States since childhood” as a factor of “prompt and particular care and consideration” in determining eligibility for prosecutorial discretion. While we commend the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for recognizing the special circumstances of DREAM-eligible youth in this guidance, we also recognize that scarce enforcement resources will still be needed to review each of these cases and that many youth may continue to fall through the cracks. Ultimately, Congressional action is necessary to provide these young people with long-term relief by means of a pathway to citizenship and to allow DHS to focus instead on those priority populations that pose a real threat to our security.

Finally, the DREAM Act would benefit not only the young people the bill targets, but our country as a whole. Passage of the bill would help secure our nation’s future prosperity by reducing the high school dropout rate and making the U.S. once again a global leader in college completion rates. The bill rewards good behavior and hard work by providing immigrant students with a strong incentive to further their education. In fact, a recent study by the UCLA North American Integration and Development Center found that youth legalized through the DREAM Act could potentially generate 1.38 to 3.6 trillion dollars over their lifetime. With statistics like these, it is no surprise that the bill has received overwhelming support from educators, business leaders, faith leaders, and the American public. In June of 2010, First Focus commissioned a public opinion poll through the Opinion Research Corporation which found that 70 percent of likely voters, including 60 percent of Republicans, favored the DREAM Act. As you are aware, the DREAM Act also passed the House of Representatives during the 2010 lame duck session and received a bipartisan majority in the Senate before falling to a filibuster. Thus, it is clear that the public and policymakers alike agree that the DREAM Act is legislation that makes sense for our country.

In closing, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we hope that Congress will focus on the facts and merits of the DREAM Act and work together to finally pass this critical piece of legislation. Since the bill was first introduced in 2001, youth across the country, immigrant and citizen alike, have rallied to make this bill a reality. For many, the DREAM Act holds their only hope for building a promising future in the only country they have ever known. The time has come to put politics aside and do right by our children. We have enclosed a letter from child advocacy organizations around the country to voice our strong support for swift passage of the DREAM Act. The First Focus Campaign for Children looks forward to working with you to achieve this important goal. If you have any questions, please contact Wendy Cervantes, VP for immigration and child rights policy, at 202-657-0637.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President

Enclosed: Children’s Advocates Urge Passage of the DREAM Act