

DREAM Act: Basic Information

MARCH 2009

■ What is the DREAM Act?

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act is bipartisan legislation that addresses the situation faced by young people who were brought to the United States years ago as undocumented immigrant children and who have since grown up here, stayed in school, and kept out of trouble.

■ Why is the DREAM Act needed?

Each year about 65,000 U.S.-raised students who would qualify for the DREAM Act's benefits graduate from high school. These include honor roll students, star athletes, talented artists, homecoming queens, and aspiring teachers, doctors, and U.S. soldiers. They are young people who have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives and desire only to call this country their home. Even though they were brought to the U.S. years ago as children, they face unique barriers to higher education, are unable to work legally in the U.S., and often live in constant fear of detection by immigration authorities.

Our immigration law currently has no mechanism to consider the special equities and circumstances of such students. The DREAM Act would eliminate this flaw. It is un-American to indefinitely and irremediably punish them for decisions made by adults many years ago. By enacting the DREAM Act, Congress would legally recognize what is de facto true: these young people belong here.

DREAM Act students should be allowed to get on with their lives. If Congress fails to act this year, another entire class of outstanding, law-abiding high school students will graduate without being able to plan for the future, and some will be removed from their homes to countries they barely know. This tragedy will cause America to lose a vital asset: an educated class of promising immigrant students who have demonstrated a commitment to hard work and a strong desire to be contributing members of our society.

■ What is the DREAM Act's current status?

The DREAM Act was reintroduced in the House and Senate on March 26, 2009. The bill was introduced in

the Senate by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Richard Lugar (R-IN), and in the House by Representatives Howard Berman (D-CA), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), along with the following original cosponsors.

SENATORS

Russell Feingold (D-WI)
Edward Kennedy (D-MA)
Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
Joe Lieberman (I-CT)
Mel Martinez (R-FL)
Harry Reid (D-NV)

REPRESENTATIVES

Joseph Cao (R-LA)
John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI)
Devin Nunez (R-CA)
Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL)
Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)
Jared Polis (D-CO)
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)

Support for the DREAM Act has grown each year since it was first introduced in 2001 during the 107th Congress. In past years it has garnered 48 Senate cosponsors and more than 152 Republican and Democratic House cosponsors, more than one-third of the House. It has twice passed the Senate Judiciary Committee in bipartisan fashion, by a 16-3 vote in the 2003-04 108th Congress, and again in 2006 by a voice vote without dissent as an amendment to the comprehensive immigration reform bill. In May 2006, the DREAM Act passed the full Senate as part of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S. 2611). On October 24, 2007, in a 52-44 vote in the Senate, the DREAM Act (S. 2205) fell just 8 votes shy — with four senators absent for the vote — of the 60 votes necessary to proceed with debate on the bill.

The DREAM Act continues to attract bipartisan support and now, for the first time, also enjoys the strong backing of the House and Senate leadership, all of the relevant committee chairs, and President Obama.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

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