



PERSPECTIVES *for a* DIVERSE AMERICA

DREAM Act of 2011

Laura Vazquez, an analyst for the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), presented this statement to a Congressional subcommittee at the hearing “S. 952, DEVELOPMENT, RELIEF, AND EDUCATION FOR ALIEN MINORS (DREAM) ACT OF 2011” on June 28, 2011.

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STATEMENT OF Laura Vazquez
Immigration Legislative Analyst
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
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

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States — works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. ...

NCLR has a long institutional history of advocating for the “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act” since it was first introduced in 2001. NCLR, our Affiliates, and our many coalition partners are committed to working with Congress to enact the “DREAM Act” and will continue to work with a distinguished group of bipartisan members of Congress who have refused to give up on their vision of seeing this legislation enacted. Congress needs to put its weight behind this proposal for what it is: a measure geared toward a select group of young people which will promote our nation’s future prosperity. The “DREAM Act” would allow our country to thrive from the contributions made by promising and hardworking immigrant youth . These youth were brought to the U.S. at a young age, but they are not able to fully contribute to American society because of their immigration status. Many did not even know about their status until they applied for college and were surprised to find that they are undocumented in the only country that they consider home.

One student whose story represents the hundreds of thousands of young people who stand to benefit from the

“DREAM Act” is Emilio, a young man who was brought to the U.S. by his parents when he was six years old: “I went through elementary, middle, and high school in North Carolina, and it is the only place that I call home. I graduated from high school in 2010 as one of the top ten students in my class, an honor student, and an AP scholar with hundreds of hours of community service. I was awarded a full-ride scholarship to my first choice university. However, unless the broken immigration system is fixed, when I graduate from college in four years I won’t be able to use my degree. My dream is to give back to my community.”

Our country is deprived when hardworking immigrant youth like Emilio are unable to pursue a college education and contribute to our economy. These students have extraordinary potential, and we must cultivate it if we are to meet the challenges before us. Over the years, more and more young people like Emilio have come forward and told their stories. If the “DREAM Act” is not enacted, our country will continue to lose a talented cadre of students and leaders each year. These immigrant students graduate from U.S. high schools and colleges with no prospects of employment or opportunities to fully contribute to our country. Unfortunately, many bright immigrant students do not even make it this far, as their immigration status and the associated barriers to higher education lead some of them to drop out of high school, which costs taxpayers considerably and weakens our economy. The “DREAM Act” would eliminate these barriers for many students, and its requirement for students to graduate high school would provide a strong incentive for those who might otherwise drop out due to frustration over their lack of opportunities.

Quite simply, we cannot continue to squander the potential of these students and deprive our country of their extraordinary contributions. The “DREAM Act” is sensible public policy that is part and parcel of our ambitions for innovation, economic competitiveness, and growth. ...

We know that the students who would benefit from the “DREAM Act” will contribute more than \$1 trillion in their lifetimes, and the Congressional Budget Office reported that enacting the “DREAM Act” would reduce the deficit by \$1.4 billion dollars over ten years. However, the intangible benefits of investing in these students’ futures are immeasurable. These students are success stories in their communities, serving as student body presidents, star athletes, and performers, graduating often with honors from schools in their hometowns. They want the chance to go on to college or serve in the military to continue giving back to the only country they have ever called home. The beneficiaries of the “DREAM Act” are our future teachers, nurses, and engineers.

The Latino community stands strongly behind the “DREAM Act” and has urged Congress repeatedly to make the legislation a reality. NCLR has frequently sent action alerts to our allies asking them to make calls to their members of Congress in support of the “DREAM Act,” and the response rate has always been very positive. For example, NCLR generated more than 14,000 emails to members of Congress urging them to support the “DREAM Act,” and in a matter of a few weeks at the end of 2010, NCLR generated more than 11,000 calls to senators urging them to vote in favor of the “DREAM Act.” Moreover, in December 2010, a cross-section of distinguished Latino leaders from across the political spectrum, as well as in business, entertainment, and sports, sent a letter to Senate leadership urging them to pass the “DREAM Act.” The luminaries in our community demonstrated that support for the “DREAM Act” cuts across party lines and rises above politics, for this issue is near and dear to Hispanics from all walks of life—it is about realizing the potential of people who came to this country at a young age and stand to contribute to America’s future. These activities demonstrate what polling numbers have long told us about support for the act; for example, a poll conducted by Latino Decisions in September 2010, when the “DREAM Act” was going to be added as an amendment to the “Department of Defense Authorization Act of 2011” (S. 3454), showed that 77.5% of Latino registered voters supported the amendment. Since then, support for the “DREAM Act” among Latino voters has grown, with 85% of Latino voters saying in February 2011 that they support the “DREAM Act.”

In conclusion, NCLR stands with the business community, educators, elected officials, union leaders, military officials, faith leaders, and others who support this legislation. A decade is much too long to have been waiting for this sensible legislation to be enacted. Recently, we have seen state and local politicians following Washington’s example of exploiting voters’ frustrations while failing to deliver real solutions. For example, in Alabama, the governor signed a draconian immigration bill that restricts access to education for immigrant

youth. Ultimately, the American public, especially the families and communities in these states, is left to grapple with the consequences of incendiary rhetoric without meaningful action. Congress would do well to move on the “DREAM Act,” which would address one of the most glaring inadequacies of our immigration laws. The rationale for the “DREAM Act” is clear and compelling, and the public support for its passage is large and continues to grow.

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