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The DREAM Act Should Include Students Who Have Waited Nine Years for its Passage

Since Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Hatch (R-UT) first introduced the DREAM Act in 2001¹, students across the country who grew up in the United States have eagerly awaited its passage. At the time of introduction, the age limit for students who qualified under the bill to apply was 26. Because these same students are still waiting for passage of the DREAM Act today, the current version of the bill (S. 729) adjusts the maximum age of qualification to 35 in order to include them. Some argue that these students are no longer children; however, these students came to this country through migration decisions made by their parents and were raised here just like their younger counterparts. These students know no other country. And they are eagerly waiting for the opportunity to contribute to the neediest sectors of the economy.

Lowering the age limit in the DREAM Act will prevent highly skilled students from contributing to key sectors of the United States economy.

- There are key sectors of our economy, including nursing, teaching, and science that continue to struggle for a qualified workforce, despite high unemployment rates. Many of these older students have been to college, have received degrees in these areas, and are just waiting to help meet the needs of these critical industries. According to the Migration Policy Institute, passage of the DREAM Act will allow these students to demonstrate our significant investment in them as human capital, a resource critical to our society.²
- Examples of students who are economic assets and who would not qualify if the age were lowered include:
 - **Tolu Olubunmi** was born in Nigeria but spent the last fifteen years in the United States. In high school, she was an avid student. As a result of her hard work, she received a full scholarship to Washington and Lee University in Virginia. Tolu received a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering in 2002. Rather than returning to Nigeria, Tolu wanted to stay in the United States to contribute to the economy through her specialization in chemical engineering, but she has not been able to do so because of her undocumented status. If the maximum age for qualification is lowered, Tolu will be excluded from the DREAM Act. Her contributions to the United States will be lost.
 - **Julieta Garibay** is a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing as well as a Master of Science in Nursing, focusing on

¹ The DREAM Act allows individuals to apply for legal permanent resident status on a *conditional* basis if, upon enactment of the law, they are under the age of 35, arrived in the United States before the age of 16, have lived in the United States for at least the last five years, and have obtained a US high school diploma or equivalent. See Jeanne Batalova and Margie McHugh, *DREAM vs. Reality: An Analysis of Potential DREAM Act Beneficiaries* (Migration Policy Institute, July 2010), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/DREAM-Insight-July2010.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 18.

Public Health. Julieta's mother brought her to the United States when she was 11 years old in search of a better life. Julieta's greatest desire is to practice nursing and to contribute to the critical shortage of facing the United States today. If the maximum age of qualification is lowered, Julieta will be excluded from the DREAM Act.

While the contributions that these DREAM students would make are vast, the contributions that these students would make to the U.S. economy far outweigh any concerns about age.

- Many DREAM students between the ages of 26 and 35 already have a high school degree and some have a college degree, yet they cannot legally work in the U.S. If legalized, they would be able to start paying taxes. The U.S. Department of Labor found that the wages of immigrants in the 1986 legalization increased 15 percent over five years,³ and that the immigrants move on to "significantly better jobs."⁴
- These students, like the others, have to meet the same educational or military service requirements. Maintaining the maximum age of qualification not only means keeping our promise to these students, it also means making use of their skills. The loss of their potential productivity is also a loss for this country.

Including students who would have been included if the DREAM Act had passed in 2001 is fair.

- These students, like their younger counterparts, came to this country through migration decisions made by their parents and were raised in the U.S. just like their younger counterparts. These students deserve a chance to succeed and should not be blamed for Congress' inaction over the past nine years.
- These students have spent at least half of their lives here. They know no other country. They have volunteered in our communities, worshiped with us in our churches, and gone to school with our children. These students are all-but American; they serve our nation, and they want the opportunity to contribute to this country.

Do not exclude these valuable assets from investing in our country. Please maintain qualification for students who have would have qualified for the DREAM Act in 2001.

³ Roberto G. Gonzales, *Wasted Talent and Broken Dreams: The Lost Potential of Undocumented Students* (Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, American Immigration Law Foundation, October 2007), p. 3; citing Shirley Smith, Roger G. Kramer, and Audrey Singer, *Effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act: Characteristics and Labor Market Behavior of 9 the Legalized Population Five Years Following Legalization* (Washington, DC: Bureau of International Labor Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor, May 1996).

⁴ Roberto G. Gonzales, *Young Lives on Hold* (New York, NY: College Board Advocacy, April 2009), p. 13; citing Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Deborah A. Cobb-Clark, "IRCA's Impact on the Occupational Concentration and Mobility of Newly-Legalized Mexican Men," *Journal of Population Economics* 13, no. 1 (2000): 81-98.