

PEACE and JUSTICE

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SPOTLIGHT ON IMMIGRATION III: The DREAM Act

A Reflection on the DREAM Act...

For years, some have viewed the DREAM Act as a means to further illegal immigration, while still others refuse to acknowledge its benefits. In reality, the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (The "DREAM Act") is a proposed federal legislation that will bring about great opportunity for young immigrants across the globe.

For me, moving from Ghana, West Africa to the United States at the age of three was full of great memories, a new environment, and exciting adventures; however it was not until I was fourteen years old that I began to experience the true hardships of immigration. At the time, both of my parents had returned to our homeland in search for jobs, leaving my older siblings and I desperately searching ways to remain in the United States. As young students with no opportunity to work or drive – battling stricter immigration laws because of September 11th – my family and I prayed relentlessly for a legislative miracle to pass Congress. Though success did not come for us at that time, the DREAM Act has finally made its debut within the Federal Government and was officially introduced to the House of Representatives in March 2009.

If passed, this bill will provide immigrant students who arrived in the United States as children at least five years prior to the bill's enactment and graduated from US high schools, the rare opportunity to earn conditional permanent residency. By law, these students must be of 'good moral character', must strive to attend college or serve two years within the military. Providing this opportunity to young adults such as myself, not only promotes social justice and community, but grants us the ability to live each day without the fear of immigration restraints or restrictions. We will be given the chance to work, travel, pursue a higher education, and live our lives independently from legal constraints.

Without a doubt, the DREAM Act will change lives. To find more information about the DREAM Act or to write to your local congressman, please visit dreamact.info.

~Josephine Ossei-Anto

DREAM Act Question and Answer

Q: What does the DREAM Act stand for?

A: Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act

Q: What is the purpose of the DREAM Act?

A: To give individuals who came to the United States as undocumented immigrants at a young age an opportunity to become citizens and give back to the country that they have grown up in.

Q: Who is affected by the DREAM Act?

A: An individual between the ages of 12 and 35 who has entered the United States before the age of 15. The individual must also have been in the United States for at least five consecutive years prior to the enactment of the DREAM Act. Finally, the individual must have graduated from high school in the United States, have received a GED, been accepted to college, or plan on enlisting in the military.

Q: Why is the DREAM Act needed?

A: There is no current immigration law that considers the unique condition of these individuals. About 65,000 individuals, who fall under the qualifications of the DREAM Act graduate from high school, yet have no means of working or continuing on to higher education. These students are often law-abiding, intelligent individuals.

"The DREAM Act would help me, and students in my situation, **realize our dreams** of becoming active members of society..."

~Maria, age 21; student affected by the DREAM Act

A History of the DREAM Act

A Bill Similar to the DREAM Act was introduced in 2001 to the 107th Congress. The Bill was HR. 1918.

This bill has also been introduced to the 108th and 109th Congress, respectively. Often, the bill would include information concerning Comprehensive Immigration Reform Acts that had failed to pass in previous Congresses.

There of course has always been opposition. Some labeled the DREAM Act as amnesty that would only encourage further illegal immigration. Others stated that the DREAM Act, though worthy legislation, should only be enacted as part of a Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Most recently, the Dream Act was introduced to the House of Representatives on March 26, 2009. It has just been dropped in the 111th Congress. The Bill has certain requirements. The student must have:

- * Arrived in the US at the age of 15 or under
- * Lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years
- * Graduated from high school
- * Served in the military or attend college for at least two years
- * Good moral character

Here are some ways you can live justly everyday!

- Make a regular commitment to reading the newspaper or a weekly news magazine and look carefully for justice issues in our country and world.
- Look for TV news shows and documentaries which focus on justice issues. Make time to watch and discuss these TV shows.
- Write a "Letter to the Editor" of your local newspaper or school paper expressing your concern about the situation of those who suffer from injustice. A letter written in response to a particular news item or story is most effective.
- Become familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people's basic needs and address justice issues. Visit, call, fax or write to your town, state and/or national representatives (U.S. senators and representatives) with your concern about a specific bill or proposal. Volunteer time with a local agency or organization that is working to change the situations which keep injustice alive and people in need.

What Can YOU Do?

...to get more involved with the Immigration Issue in Buffalo...

Visit these sites to learn more about the DREAM Act:

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
<http://www.nclr.org/content/policy/detail/1331/>

DreamACTivist - United We DREAM Coalition: Undocumented Students Action and Resource Network
<http://dreamactivist.org/tag/dream-act-2009/>

Wikipedia: DREAM Act
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DREAM_Act

Visit these sites to learn more about immigration:

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Form Services: Your Online U.S. Immigration Source
www.immigrationdirect.com

United States Immigration Support
<http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/>

Justice for Immigrants Campaign
<http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/>

