

National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

December 20, 2017

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: NHLA Support of the Dream Act of 2017, S. 1615/H.R. 3440

Dear Senator or Representative:

We write on behalf of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a coalition of the leading national Latino nonpartisan civil rights and advocacy organizations, in support of S.1615/H.R. 3440, Dream Act of 2017 (“Dream Act”). The Dream Act is a bipartisan and bicameral bill that will provide a pathway to citizenship for “Dreamers,” or undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children. The Dream Act could provide relief to approximately 3.2 million undocumented Americans and give them an opportunity to obtain legal status.¹ We urge you to support the Dream Act and join the 76 percent of Americans—including two thirds of President Trump’s supporters—who believe Dreamers should stay in the U.S.² **NHLA will closely monitor this matter for inclusion in future NHLA scorecards evaluating Member support for the Latino community, including any votes to pass a continuing resolution or spending bill without inclusion of the Dream Act.**

President Trump’s decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program upended the lives of nearly 800,000 DACA holders, only a third of whom were eligible to renew their DACA status before the arbitrary and insufficient October 5, 2017 deadline. This is a critical issue for the Latino community given that 93.5 percent of DACA holders are Latino. As has always been the case, Congress is responsible for passing a permanent legislative fix for DACA holders. The program’s expiration has made this reality even more urgent.

The Dream Act will automatically protect DACA holders from deportation. The bill would grant DACA holders, and others who meet a certain set of educational, work, or service requirements, conditional permanent resident (CPR) status and ultimately a path to naturalization. Specifically, the Dream Act will allow undocumented high school graduates and GED recipients to join a three-step path to citizenship through college, work, or service in the armed forces. In order to be eligible for CPR status, granted for up to eight years, persons must have entered the U.S. before the age of 18; been continuously present for at least four years prior to enactment of the Act; not been convicted of a crime where the term of imprisonment was for more than a year, or convicted of three or more offenses for which the total sentence was 90 days or more.

Dreamers who successfully maintain their CPR status will be eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status by completing at least: 1) two years of higher education; 2) two years of military service with an honorable discharge; or 3) by demonstrating employment over a period of three years. Hardship waivers will be available to individuals who are unable to meet one of these requirements, such as people with disabilities or people who are full-time caregivers to minor children.³

¹ Jeanne Batalova, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Sarah Pierce, & Randy Capps, Differing DREAMS: Estimating the Unauthorized Populations that Could Benefit Under Different Legalization Bills, Migration Policy Institute (Oct. 2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/differing-dreams-estimating-unauthorized-populations-could-benefit-under-different>.

² William Gaston, *Two-Thirds of Trump Supporters Want Dreamers to Stay in U.S.*, Brookings Institute (Sept. 13, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2017/09/13/two-thirds-of-trump-supporters-want-dreamers-to-stay-in-u-s/>.

³ DACA holders would be eligible to for LPR status sooner than non-DACA recipients.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alianza Americas
American G.I. Forum
ASPIRA Association
Avance Inc.
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
Farmworker Justice
Green Latinos
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic National Bar Association
Inter-University Program for Latino Research
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of United Latin American Citizens
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Mi Familia Vota
National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives
National Association of Hispanic Publications
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
NALEO Educational Fund
National Association of Latino Independent Producers
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Hispanic Environmental Council
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Institute for Latino Policy
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Presente.org
SER Jobs for Progress National
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project
UnidosUS
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
U.S.- Mexico Foundation
Voto Latino

After five years of LPR status, an individual can apply for U.S. citizenship. Any proposal to lengthen the Dream Act's considerable period of CPR and LPR status before being eligible to naturalize will only create further harm to the Latino community and our families who have waited decades for sound immigration policy reform.

While other bills attempt to find a middle ground on this issue, none currently provide relief for Dreamers that is as comprehensive and inclusive as the Dream Act. Protecting this population is critical for our country. Dreamers contribute to our economy and our communities. In fact, a recent survey of DACA holders showed that because of DACA, 95 percent of recipients were working or in school; 63 percent got a better paying job; 54 percent bought their first car; and 12 percent bought their first home. Given this data, it is certain that permanent relief will further propel individuals to continue to make these invaluable contributions to our economy. For instance, it will allow schools to keep the 20,000 teachers who are eligible for DACA in the classroom with their students. Most important, a permanent fix will keep families together, as most individuals who would be covered by the Dream Act have immediate U.S. citizen family members, including U.S. citizen children.

It is disappointing that an issue that affects so many people has not been given the serious consideration it merits. We must have a balanced discussion on substantive policy solutions that do not conflate immigration with criminality. Latinos are all too familiar with this tactic, designed to foment fear and hate toward our community. Instead of catering to the dog-whistles aimed at torpedoing an achievable and necessary legislative goal to provide relief for what is a small portion of the undocumented population, Congress must engage in a meaningful and good-faith effort to pass a *clean* Dream Act, free from interior enforcement or border security additions.

This bill gives Dreamers the opportunity they have earned: a path to citizenship in the only home they have ever known. This position falls in line with President Trump's assertion that Dreamers deserve relief, and the majority of the President's supporters who believe the same. Congress must not shirk its responsibility here; it must work to protect undocumented young Americans whose lives and livelihoods depend on Congressional action. The time to act is now; there must be Congressional action by the end of the year.

We urge you to fully support the Dream Act of 2017, S. 1615/H.R. 3440, including co-sponsoring the bill, signing the discharge petition to bring the bill to the floor, and expressing public support for a vote. We will score any votes related to this legislation, and urge you to vote against passage of any continuing resolution or other spending bill if this issue is not first resolved or included.

Please contact NHLA through Andrea Senteno, of MALDEF, at asenteno@maldef.org, or Laura Esquivel, of Hispanic Federation, at lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org, with any questions regarding this issue. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Hector E. Sanchez Barba
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Executive Director
NHLA Chair



Thomas A. Saenz
MALDEF, President and General Counsel
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair



Jose Calderon
Hispanic Federation, President
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair