



The Dream Act of 2017 (S. 1615 & H.R. 3440)

Overview

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout its history, people have moved here from all over the world and have contributed to their communities and our national life. Today, as in the past, immigrants are also creating prosperity and enrichment for this nation.

People without documentation who live and work here are among the most vulnerable people in our country. They are more likely to live in poverty and to struggle to put food on the table. The national poverty rate is 14.8 percent, while immigrants as a group have a poverty rate of 30 percent. It is likely that the poverty rate of undocumented households is even higher. Immigrants without documentation have a food-insecurity rate twice that of the overall U.S. population. (see table below).

Background

Each year, approximately 50,000-65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools.¹ Many of these students were brought to the United States when they were very young and are American in every way except on paper. These young undocumented adults are often referred to as “Dreamers.” Dreamers only know the United States as home and are engaged in local communities through work, church, and school. Many Dreamers are currently protected from deportation due to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

President Obama established DACA through executive order in 2012 after Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act of 2010. The temporary program allows Dreamers to come forward, pass a background check, and apply for work permits. DACA provides temporary relief and protection from



Bread for the World photo

removal and work authorization to nearly 800,000 Dreamers. Because DACA is not law, but only an executive action, the protections in place for Dreamers can be easily changed or terminated at any time by the Trump administration or the Department of Justice.

FOOD INSECURITY

	General Population	Undocumented Immigrants
All households	12.7%	24%* ¹
Households with children	7.8%	N/A
Female-headed households with children	30.3%	Between 30-46%*
Migrant and seasonal workers	N/A	50-65%*

*Percentage is based on a subset of immigrants and/or refugees.

Sources: “Food Security in the United States, 2015,” U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service and “Food Insecurity among Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylees,” Food Research and Action Center. February 2016.

Numerous findings indicate that legal status provides undocumented youth access to higher paying jobs and additional educational attainment. In addition, it allows them to increase their contribution to the local economy. According to the Center for American Progress, Dreamers who receive DACA received a 45 percent on-average wage increase; in fact, 87 percent of recipients are currently working.

(continued on next page)

Overview of Bill

In July 2017, the Dream Act of 2017 was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Richard Durbin (D- Ill.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) as S. 1615, and in the House of Representatives by Reps. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.-40) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.-27) as H.R. 3440.

The Dream Act of 2017 would offer a path to permanent legal status for millions of undocumented immigrant youths. The bill passage is crucial given the fact that DACA's future is uncertain. Recently, 10 attorneys general sent the U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions a letter threatening to sue the Trump administration if the DACA program was not terminated by Sept. 5, 2017.

A pathway to citizenship under the Dream Act would ensure that Dreamers can continue to contribute to their communities through work, service, and schooling. The proposed legislation would provide Conditional Permanent Residency and employment authorization for eight years. Afterward, Dreamers could apply for Legal Permanent Residency and begin the application process for citizenship.

Analysis

Rescinding or changing DACA without passing the Dream Act would not only have devastating effects on Dreamers and their families, whom they often support, but it would also hurt the U.S. economy. Dreamers contribute significantly to their local economies. The Center for American Progress estimates

that without the work and community contributions of Dreamers, the United States would suffer a loss of \$433.4 billion in Gross Domestic Product over 10 years.² Because a substantial percentage of undocumented immigrants in the United States lives in poverty, legalization would help them escape hunger. We advocate for legislation that ensures a place at the table for everyone in the United States, regardless of legal status.

We strongly believe in putting our faith into action. Matthew 25:35 says, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”* Part of welcoming our brothers and sisters requires advocating for their well-being and dignity. The Dream Act of 2017 provides a much-needed permanent legal pathway to citizenship for young undocumented people who only know the United States as home.

Bread for the World will continue to support legislation, like the Dream Act, that strives for lasting solutions to our broken immigration system. To ultimately end hunger, achieving solutions that last is key. We must have comprehensive immigration reform that (1) addresses the poverty and lack of opportunity in countries with high migration flows; (2) provides better opportunities for undocumented immigrants living in our country; (3) welcomes communities and persons directly affected at the policy table; and (4) includes a responsible pathway to earned citizenship.

We urge all members of Congress to co-sponsor the Dream Act of 2017.

Endnotes

¹ Oliverez, P. (2006). “The college and financial aid guide for: AB540 Undocumented Immigrant Students,” Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, University of Southern California.

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/11/18/292550/the-high-cost-of-ending-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals/>