

## Pushing the DREAM Act Forward

by  
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President Barack Obama has been criticized for presiding over a record deportation of people in immigrant communities while endorsing the DREAM Act. The day after Obama's May 10, 2011 El Paso, Texas speech, Senator Richard Durbin along with 31 co-sponsors reintroduced the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act provides a path to citizenship to undocumented high school graduates who go to college or enlist in the military. Last fall, the DREAM Act passed in the House of Representatives, but it was narrowly defeated in the Senate.

Separate from the federal DREAM Act, is the California State AB 540, which allows specified undocumented students to be exempt from paying out of state tuition while attending public institutions of higher learning such as junior colleges, colleges and universities. However, once graduated, undocumented students cannot apply for employment that would reflect their advanced degrees. Not only does the California community lose that educated talent, but the community also loses the higher taxes that would be generated by such employees. Inasmuch as California taxpayers have financed undocumented students' K-12 education, the permission to work legally would enable such students to repay taxpayers as they pay their own fair share of state and federal taxes. Passage of the DREAM Act would be a financial bonus to state and federal tax coffers.

Humanitarian concerns as well as equal access loom large for undocumented students. One such student is “Veronica,” a political science major who just graduated from UC Berkeley. Bilingual and very bright, she could not accept a UC Berkeley merit scholarship because of her illegal status. Now “Veronica” cannot stay in the Bay Area to apply for appropriate employment; instead, she must return to Los Angeles to stay with family and search for menial jobs that might allow her to survive without fear of deportation. She could also go to Mexico where her advanced degree would earn her a high-paying job, but she is unfamiliar with Mexico. She grew up in the United States, and she fears moving to a country where drug wars and corruption are rampant. “Veronica” arrived in the United States when she was a young child and has few memories of Mexico. She sees herself as an American, and she is an American in every way except for her lack of documentation.

Immigration activists realize they must galvanize public support to make Obama push for reform and pass the DREAM Act. Already they have demanded that Obama stop deporting undocumented college graduates. Additional DREAM Act advocates and concerned citizens must increase the pressure until Congress passes this legislation. About 50,000 undocumented high school students graduate every year. Seventy percent of Americans support the DREAM Act. Most undocumented students cannot advocate for themselves because if their illegal status is made known, they can be deported. It is up to current American citizens to make Obama do what is right: permitting the United States to accept educated immigrant young people as equals.