



# IMMIGRATION NEWSLETTER

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## AMNESTY FOR UNDOCUMENTED CHILDREN

By Julie Sparks, Immigration Attorney

Originally introduced in 2003, the DREAM Act is once again pending in Congress. The DREAM Act would essentially provide amnesty to many undocumented children in the United States. Debate on the DREAM Act is currently scheduled to take place in the U.S. Senate during early November.

### **Who will the DREAM Act benefit?**

The DREAM Act will benefit countless children who are currently undocumented. Many of those who would benefit entered the U.S. at an early age and have no memory of their home country. Many consider themselves to be American and do not speak the language of their home country, to which many have never traveled.

These children and young adults now find themselves with few options. They are largely barred from legalizing their status due to the fact that they entered illegally. They must choose to either remain in the U.S. illegally or return to their home countries. If they return, they face permanent separation from their families as they will not be permitted to reenter legally. If they remain in the U.S., they will not be permitted to work and they will continue to live in fear of deportation.

### **How will the DREAM Act help undocumented children and young adults?**

The DREAM Act is a legalization program which will provide undocumented children with an incentive to earn high school diplomas and college degrees. The program would provide conditional resident status to those who entered the U.S. illegally prior to the age of 16 provided that they have lived in the U.S. for five years, they have demonstrated good moral character, and they have either earned a high school diploma or gained admission to a college or university. The DREAM Act will afford young adults the opportunity to attend college and work legally. Eventually, these young adults will be permitted to apply for their green card.

### **Why should you support the DREAM Act?**

Many states have recently passed legislation which, for the first time, makes college education a possibility for undocumented high school graduates. In California, such students may attend state colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates, regardless of their lack of legal status.

While similar legislation has been warmly received by advocates and educators around the country, these laws have not solved the underlying problem. The first wave of students who benefited from these previous laws are now beginning to graduate from college, but because they still have no avenue by which to legalize their status, they are unable to work and put their hard-earned degrees to use. For these students, their future still leads to a dead-end road. Passage of the DREAM Act, however, will bring hope and opportunity to the lives of undocumented children and young adults by offering them a chance to obtain legal status in the country in which they have lived almost their entire lives.

### **How can you support passage of the DREAM Act?**

U.S. citizens who support passage of the DREAM Act should call their congressional representative to voice their opinion about this issue. If U.S. citizens band together, we can help change the law to benefit the thousands of undocumented immigrant children in our communities. Please contact your congressional representative by visiting <http://capwiz.com/aila2/home/> or by calling (202) 224-3121.