

Backgrounder:

The DREAM Act

The [DREAM Act](#) is bipartisan legislation that would give eligible young people who were brought to the U.S. as children the opportunity to legalize their immigration status and work towards citizenship.

To move from being undocumented to being a U.S. citizen, eligible young people would be required to pass background checks, be of good moral character, graduate from high school and go on to attend college or serve in the military. It is estimated that each year, 65,000 young people graduate from high school in the U.S. who find themselves unable to work, join the military or go to college because of their immigration status. Approximately 800,000 young people would be eligible for the DREAM Act upon passage.

The stories of these young people are truly tragic. For example, at the age of 12, [Ivan Nikolov](#) missed a court date after he and his mother came to the U.S. the year before. A decade later, federal agents raided his family home and his mother, who was married to a U.S. citizen, was deported. Ivan sat in prison for three months because of an immigration violation, even though he has committed no crime and had no role in the decision to stay in the U.S. without papers. Ivan grew up in Michigan, graduated from high school, has a U.S. citizen stepfather and fiancée, and speaks nearly no Russian. Ivan considers himself an American, yet he was scheduled to be deported to Russia, where he will be forced to join their military or be sent to a Russian prison. After a flurry of activity by Ivan's family and advocates around the country, the Department of Homeland Security released him from jail and his deportation was deferred. But our broken immigration system cannot be fixed one case at a time.

The DREAM Act would enable eligible young people like Ivan, who are American in all but paperwork, to resolve their immigration status and become fully contributing members of our society.

Now is the time for Congress to pass the DREAM Act

While broader immigration reform appears to be stalled due to partisanship, targeted immigration measures like the DREAM Act enjoy bipartisan support and should advance now as a down payment on comprehensive immigration reform. This month, [La Opinión](#), Roll Call and CQ reported that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said he would like to advance the DREAM Act this year, and the [Washington Post](#), the [Los Angeles Times](#), the [Boston Globe](#) and other newspapers have written editorials in support of the DREAM Act.

70 percent of voters support the DREAM Act

A [June 2010 national poll](#) of 1,008 adults, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for First Focus, revealed that support for the DREAM Act cuts across regional and party lines with 70 percent overall support. Sixty percent of Republicans and 80% of Democrats polled supported the DREAM Act.

The DREAM Act enjoys bipartisan support

At a time when the immigration debate in Congress appears deadlocked and polarized, the DREAM Act provides a rare opportunity for bipartisan lawmaking. [S. 729](#), the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2009, is currently co-sponsored by Sens. Dick Durbin (D-IL), Richard Lugar (R-IN) and 39 of their colleagues. Its companion bill, [H.R. 1751](#), the American DREAM Act, is co-sponsored by Reps. Howard Berman (D-CA), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), and Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), as well as 125 of their colleagues in the House of Representatives.

Education, military, religious and business leaders support the DREAM Act

The legislation is supported by a wide range of leaders from the [education](#), [military](#), and [business](#) fields, and from religious orders including the United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society; the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#); the [evangelical movement](#), the [Jewish community](#); and [many others](#).

The DREAM Act makes economic sense

The DREAM Act is a [great return on our country's investment](#), and will allow future leaders to develop and advance. The students who would benefit from the DREAM Act have been raised and educated in the U.S. State and local taxpayers have already invested in the education of these children in elementary and secondary school, and it helps no one to keep them from realizing their full potential. Leading businesses like Microsoft have endorsed the DREAM Act because they want these students to be able to stay and contribute to American innovation.

On August 11, 2010, former [Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee](#) explained to NPR the economic sense of allowing undocumented children to earn their citizenship:

"When a kid comes to his country, and he's four years old and he had no choice in it – his parents came illegally. He still, because he is in this state, it's the state's responsibility - in fact, it is the state's legal mandate - to make sure that child is in school. So let's say that kid goes to school. That kid is in our school from kindergarten through the 12th grade. He graduates as valedictorian because he's a smart kid and he works his rear end off and he becomes the valedictorian of the school. The question is: Is he better off going to college and becoming a neurosurgeon or a banker or whatever he might become, and becoming a taxpayer, and in the process having to apply for and achieve citizenship, or should we make him pick tomatoes? I think it's better if he goes to college and becomes a citizen."

The DREAM Act would reduce high school dropout rates and boost college attendance

Unfortunately, immigration status and the associated barriers to higher education contribute to a [higher-than-average dropout rate among foreign-born students](#), which costs taxpayers and the economy billions of dollars each year. The DREAM Act would provide encouragement for students who might otherwise drop out to stay in school and go on to college.

The DREAM Act would increase the pool of highly qualified recruits for the U.S. armed forces

There is a strong tradition of military service in immigrant families, but the lack of immigration status prevents many of those who wish to serve from enlisting. According to [Margaret Stock](#), Lieutenant Colonel in the Military Police Corps of the U.S. Army Reserve and an Associate Professor of Law at the United States Military Academy (West Point, NY), the DREAM Act “would allow military recruiters to enlist this highly qualified cohort of young people, and enactment of the DREAM Act would be a ‘win-win’ scenario for the Department of Defense and the United States. Deporting these young people ... deprives the United States of a valuable human asset that can be put to work in the Global War on Terrorism.”

Our broken immigration laws are getting in the way of these students and young leaders pursuing the American dream and realizing their full potential. Congress should clear the way now so they can achieve their goals. The DREAM Act is an achievable piece of legislation that will pave the way towards comprehensive immigration reform and must become law this year.

For more information on the DREAM Act:

- [National Immigration Law Center](#)
- [Senator Dick Durbin \(D-IL\)](#)
- [Stories of DREAM eligible young people at America’s Voice](#)