



STATEMENT OF

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TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION,
REFUGEES AND BORDER SECURITY,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
UNITED STATES SENATE

RE: S. 952, DEVELOPMENT, RELIEF, AND EDUCATION FOR
ALIEN MINORS (DREAM) ACT OF 2011

Submitted on behalf of:

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

June 28, 2011

Opening Doors of Educational Opportunity

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cornyn, and members of the Subcommittee,

We appreciate the opportunity to offer a statement of support for S. 952, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2011. The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) has been a staunch supporter of DREAM since its inception in 2001. NASFAA represents more than 18,000 financial aid professionals who serve 16 million students each year at 2,800 colleges and universities throughout the country.

This aptly-named legislation reinforces the most basic principles of American philosophy, history, and values. The idea that someone with nothing can work hard, become educated, find success, and do it all on their own merits is the basis for our “American Dream.” Yet it is estimated that almost a million people will miss out on the American Dream over the next decade--not because of anything they’ve done, but because of the actions of their parents. The DREAM Act seeks to rectify that injustice by giving illegal immigrants’ children, who had no choice in being brought into this country, legal residency status and a chance at higher education if they meet certain minimum requirements.

Opponents of the DREAM Act feel that it rewards illegal behavior and is nothing more than a disguised amnesty program. On the contrary, the bill seeks to hold harmless young adults who were brought here by others and who have now become assimilated into American culture and ideals. To hold someone accountable for the actions of another runs counter to the ethos that underpins our legal system. To hold children accountable for the actions of their parents runs counter to the most basic moral principles. The conditions these young people must meet under

the DREAM Act constitute a commitment to this country that belies any consideration as a handed-out amnesty.

The DREAM Act does not represent a lack of respect for current immigration law in any way. In fact, the DREAM Act is a logical add-on to a court decision that has stood for more than 30 years. The U.S. Supreme Court case *Plyer v. Doe* (1982) stated that illegal immigrants could not be denied K-12 education based on the premise that children could not be held responsible for the actions of their parents. The DREAM Act would stop the nonsensical practice of pumping taxpayer money into K-12 education for undocumented students, only to have these same students hit an educational ceiling upon high school graduation.

The individuals who would benefit from the DREAM Act already consider themselves American. They include talented and industrious young men and women who have a great deal to contribute to our society and to our ability to compete in today's world economy. To reject this potential is a senseless waste of valuable human capital. It contradicts our essential American values, and ignores that our culture and prosperity rest on our history of welcoming, assimilating, and providing opportunity for immigrant populations.

Somewhere in our relatively recent ancestries, almost of us came here from somewhere else for a chance at a better life; our strength as a nation stems from our willingness to extend that same chance to others. It is therefore terribly disturbing to read Pulitzer Prize winner Jose Antonio Vargas's story "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant," featured in *The New York Times*: "I grew up here. This is my home. Yet even though I think of myself as an American and consider

America my country, my country doesn't think of me as one of its own."

Like many other young undocumented immigrants, this man discovered he was illegal only *after* being here for some years. Many children of undocumented parents came here at such a young age that they have never conceived of themselves as anything but American.

Upon discovering their illegal status, many students who would be eligible for legal status under the DREAM Act live under constant fear of deportation to a country that is not their own. Vargas relates an incident where a music teacher redirected a planned tour abroad to a domestic engagement upon discovering his immigration status was a problem, because, she later told him, she hadn't wanted to leave any student behind. "No child left behind" has become an educational mantra in this country, an expression of one of the most worthy goals we can establish for ourselves.

At the very least, NASFAA supports and urges the immediate halt of deportations of any DREAM-eligible students. The practice of deporting children to a country they don't know is unjust and inhumane. However, if we are truly to "leave no student behind," Congress must pass the DREAM Act for deserving students who have already been in the American educational system for years and have already demonstrated their ability and worth.

NASFAA urges Congress to look to the future as well as to our past, and welcome DREAM Act-eligible immigrants to full legal status.