



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The National
Advocacy Center

May 1, 2006

Dear Representative:

We are writing on behalf of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to urge you to co-sponsor the New American Dream Act (H.R. 5131), introduced by Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Howard Berman (D-CA) and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) in April. This bill is an important step toward ensuring that hard-working immigrant youth are able to access higher education, fulfill their dreams, and contribute fully to this country.

As you well know, approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the United States without access to higher education or a pathway to change their status. Many of these students were brought to the United States when they were very young and this is the only home they know. Among them are class valedictorians, straight-A students, and others who have the academic credentials to go to college. However, because of current law, their immigration status denies them the opportunities that make college affordable: in-state tuition rates, state and federal loans, scholarships and the ability to work legally to pay for their studies. As a result, the road to achieving their dreams is blocked.

For some immigrant students, this recognition that their future is extremely limited causes them to give up and drop out, but many continue to work hard in hope that their work will be recognized and valued. The National Advocacy Center has heard from many of these students, who, in their search for opportunity have found their way to our website and shared their stories. These students' stories indicate their desire to continue their education and pursue professions and their inability to get financial assistance due to their status. Two stories are included below:

"Hi my name is G. Hernandez and I am 23 years old. I have been here since I was three years old. I graduated from high school in June of 2000 in Sacramento, California. It has been really hard for me; I have not been able to continue my education, work, or get my drivers license because of my status. It is very frustrating and it makes me angry inside to know that there are so many people in my same situation that want to better themselves and be able to help their families but are not able to. I just want to finish school and be able to take care of my family and myself, feel normal and also be able to talk about what I have accomplished in life!"

"Hello, my name is Lorena. I was brought to the United States when I was 12 and have been here ever since. I would love to do something to support the DREAM ACT because the only reason I did not go to college is because I was denied government

help. I cannot get a student loan; I can't even get a driver's license. So let me know what I can do to help support the DREAM ACT."

These stories along with what we learn from Good Shepherd programs throughout the country underscore the incredible promise that these youth have to offer and highlight the overwhelming need for reform that the New American Dream Act will provide. The legislation will break down many of the barriers to higher education that U.S.-raised immigrant students face and start them on the path to citizenship and pursuit of their dreams. Increasing access to higher education and granting legal status will help lower high-school drop out rates and allow talented immigrant students to more fully contribute to our society as well-trained, productive and tax-paying workers.

The National Advocacy Center hopes you will co-sponsor the New American Dream Act. With graduation not far off, we look forward to working with you to ensure quick passage of this important legislation so that high school is not the end of the road for thousands of deserving immigrant students.

Sincerely,

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