

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

December 23, 2010

Mr. Greg Chen  
Director of Advocacy  
American Immigration Lawyers Association  
Suite 300, 1331 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005-3142

Dear Mr. Chen:

Thank you for contacting me regarding H.R. 5281, the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act). I share your frustration with the flaws in our immigration system. However, there are bills like the DREAM Act that deserve consideration. On December 18, 2010, I joined many of my Senate colleagues to vote for the DREAM Act. While the DREAM Act had passed in the United States House of Representatives a week earlier, it fell short of passage in the Senate.

The DREAM Act would have permitted high school graduates to earn United States citizenship if they were 15 years old or younger when they entered the country before 2005. In order to qualify graduates would have had to apply for legal residency within one year of the bill's passage, demonstrate good moral character, complete two years of higher education or military service, pay back taxes and demonstrate the ability to read, write and speak English.

There is a rich precedent supporting the service of non-citizens in the U.S. military. Today, approximately 35,000 non-citizens serve in the U.S. military, and about 8,000 permanent resident aliens enlist every year. According to a 2009 report by Mission: Readiness, a group of retired military leaders, statistics released by the Pentagon reveal that only 25 percent of young people 17 to 24 are able to enlist in the military – and 75 percent of our nation's youth are not eligible to serve our country due to failure to graduate high school, a criminal record or physical fitness issues. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who has served under both Democratic and Republican presidents, continues to support this initiative because the DREAM Act would improve recruitment to our nation's all volunteer military – growing our military base and ensuring the security of our nation.

According to data from the Immigration Policy Center, there are currently 2.1 million undocumented youths living in the U.S. Without the DREAM Act, these young people are unlikely to go to college and are not able to serve in the military. In addition, due to their inability to work legally in the U.S., these young people cannot serve as productive members of society. H.R. 5281 would have helped address this growing problem. If passed, the bill would have provided an avenue for these undocumented youths to become legal U.S. citizens after 10 years once they had met the Act's requirements showing that they would contribute positively to American society.

I understand that there were many viewpoints on this legislation. However, all of these children were brought into the United States when they were 15 years old or younger, and many

have never called another nation home. In my view, they deserved a chance to become citizens of the nation that they call home – and to become productive members of society. I believe that the eligibility requirements in the DREAM Act were sufficiently stringent, and that they would only apply to young people of strong character who were willing to give back to this great country.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to hear from you and I hope you will continue to contact me on issues of mutual concern. Please visit my website at <http://landrieu.senate.gov> for more information on legislative issues.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,

  
Mary L. Landrieu  
U.S. Senator

MLL/mg