



Model AILA Advocacy on the DREAM Act – AILA Member Letters to Capitol Hill

Here are two outstanding examples of DREAM Advocacy by AILA members Paul Parsons and Gerry Chapman.

Texas member Paul Parsons wrote to his Senator, Kay Bailey Hutchison, in support of the DREAM Act. He received a half-hearted and poorly researched response from her office that said the senator opposes the legislation because it ultimately grants citizenship to the parents of DREAM beneficiaries. In response to the half-baked note, Paul wrote the following letter to debunk the myth of chain migration and again urge her vote affirmatively for the DREAM Act:

Dear Senator Hutchison -

I am so disappointed that you intend to vote against the current (already watered down) version of the DREAM Act. You indicate that they could later petition for some of their relatives to immigrate. Please read why your objection is misguided.

These kids were brought here by their parents, and most of them do not even remember life in another country. They have been our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and classmates in our communities for ten, twenty, and in some cases thirty years.

The DREAM Act would allow them to proudly serve in our country's armed services (which really needs them) or to attend college for at least two years (which would also benefit our country). They would only be granted a ten YEAR conditional non-immigrant (i.e. temporary status). After ten long years, they could then apply for permanent resident ("green card") status. Only then could they wait three additional years before beginning the naturalization process (which is by no means automatic).

What happens if they earn naturalization after waiting for over thirteen long years? If they have a mother or father who unlawfully entered the U.S, that parent would then be required under our immigration laws to return to his/her home country and face a TEN YEAR BAR for having been unlawfully present in the U.S. There is no waiver available for an unlawful presence bar for a parent of a U.S. citizen. That parent would need to wait outside the U.S. for ten years before applying to lawfully return to the U.S. I didn't make this up... these ten year bars were passed by our Congress in the Illegal Immigration Reform & Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. The result is that if the DREAM Act student qualifies over thirteen years later for U.S. citizenship, his/her parent would then need to leave the U.S. for another ten years before qualifying to immigrate as the parent of a naturalized citizen.

What if after over thirteen years a DREAM Act student becomes a U.S. citizen and files a petition for a brother or sister? Right now if a naturalized U.S. citizen from

Mexico had filed a petition for a sibling prior to December 22, 1995, (over 15 YEARS ago), a visa number would only be available today for that brother/sister to apply for a "green card." If in the U.S. without permission, that applicant would then be required under our restrictive immigration laws to depart from the U.S. for ten more YEARS prior to seeking to any visa or "green card." The waiting lists for siblings of U.S. citizens are incredibly backlogged, and do not advance one year each year. Filing today, it would probably take more than thirty YEARS before a sibling's turn would be reached on the waiting list.

A U.S. citizen CANNOT petition at all for a grandparent, niece, nephew, uncle, aunt, or cousin under our immigration laws.

Please reconsider your position. You have spoken with many of these courageous DREAM Act students, and you know in your heart that they should be given this opportunity to serve our country. You know they would become wonderful U.S. citizens and they are already willing to defend our proud country at home and abroad.

I respectfully request that you do what's right and vote in favor of the DREAM Act.

Sincerely,
Paul Parsons

Another example of outstanding advocacy is from Gerry Chapman in North Carolina who wrote to his Senator, Kay Hagan - a swing vote on the DREAM Act – the day after the House voted to pass the DREAM Act.

Dear Senator Hagan –

The House vote on the DREAM Act last night was a historic one, and it presents the Senate with a unique opportunity to address the impossible position that so many young immigrants are in. This is not a total solution to the problem that all of us wanted to see addressed in comprehensive legislation. That missed opportunity is frustrating, but if we look back at the Civil Rights era, progress in that time came slowly and incrementally, too. The slow pace in that era that made us think nothing was changing, but in retrospect, our generation has gone from a totally segregated society to one that really does value merit in virtually every arena. The same is true here: in 10 years or more we will look back on today and realize that this one small step was a lynchpin for the progress we will see in the years to come.

Two major arguments against this bill were voiced in the House repeatedly. One is the boogeyman of "chain migration". This is nothing but a red herring. A child who obtains a green card through the DREAM Act will not be able to sponsor a parent for as much as 10 years. The undocumented parent then would have to return to the home country and wait for 10 more years before returning to the US as a permanent resident. At that point, the parent could sponsor a spouse (who the DREAM Act child would have sponsored already), minor child (the DREAM Act

beneficiary who does not need to be sponsored) or an unmarried adult child. None of those cases would open any floodgates. In 5 more years after returning to the US, the parent could file for citizenship, and a year after that, he or she could sponsor a slightly wider group of relatives, who would have to wait several more years (those categories are backlogged for years now). The chain migration argument might be worrisome, except that it will be at least 25 to 30 years before any noticeable impact arises from the DREAM Act.

The other argument voiced by opponents is that by giving this benefit to these young children, we are taking something away from US citizens. This argument is based on a faulty idea: that there are an inherently limited number of jobs in the US, and if a job goes to one person, someone else has to lose his or her job. This “zero sum” concept is just plain wrong. These children have tremendous incentives to be productive in general, and more specifically, they are highly likely to be entrepreneurs and risk takers. They will start the small businesses that will drive our economy and create jobs for others. They will serve their country in the military, and make all of us proud. We will not lose anything, and will gain much.

Let me close with a commitment of support by AILA members in the state. Regardless of the final decision in the Senate on the DREAM Act, we will let everyone know that you championed these children and took a major personal risk in doing so. We also will let you and your staff know of as many successes of these children as possible, so that you will have multiple examples of how these children have worked hard and helped their families, their communities and their nation. With that information, you will be able to silence the critics who will argue, just as people did 60 years ago regarding the Civil Rights laws, that our economy and our culture have been fatally harmed by the DREAM Act. That has not proven true as to the Civil Rights laws; it will not be true now, either.

Sincerely,
Gerry Chapman

AILA members – follow these model letters from your AILA colleagues and contact your Senators now about the DREAM Act! <http://capwiz.com/aila2/go/DREAM2010>