

Statement of

The Honorable Dick Durbin

United States Senator
United States Senate
June 28, 2011

Opening Statement of Senator Dick Durbin
Hearing on "The DREAM Act"
Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security Subcommittee
June 28, 2011

As Prepared for Delivery

This hearing of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security will come to order. Today's hearing is on the DREAM Act, legislation that would allow a select group of immigrant students to earn legal status.

Before I begin, I want to thank Senator Leahy, the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and Senator Schumer, the Chairman of the Immigration Subcommittee, for their long-standing support for the DREAM Act, and for giving me the opportunity to hold the first-ever Senate hearing on this bill.

Thousands of immigrant students in the United States were brought to the United States as children. It was not their decision to come to this country, but they grew up here pledging allegiance to our flag and singing our national anthem. They are American in their hearts.

The DREAM Act would give these young people a chance to earn legal status if they have good moral character and go to college or serve in the military.

The DREAM Act would make America a stronger country by giving these talented immigrants the chance to fulfill their potential.

The young people who would be eligible for the DREAM Act call themselves Dreamers.

Over the years, I have met hundreds of these students. Today, I want to introduce a few of them.

Ten years ago, I was contacted by Ann Monaco, a teacher at the Merit School of Music in Chicago. One of her students - Tereza Lee - was a musical prodigy who had played as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She had been accepted into several of the country's most prestigious music schools. But Tereza had a problem. Her parents had brought her to the United States when she was two, and she was undocumented.

We contacted the INS and they told us there was only one option: Tereza would have to leave the

United States. That's when I began to work on the DREAM Act.

Tereza went on to obtain her BA and Masters degree from the Manhattan School of Music. In 2009, she played her debut at Carnegie Hall. Today, Tereza is pursuing her Doctorate at the Manhattan School of Music.

Nelson and Jhon Magdaleno were brought to this country from Venezuela when Nelson was 11 and Jhon was 9.

In high school, Jhon was the 4th highest ranking officer and Commander of the Air Honor Society in Junior R.O.T.C.

Nelson and John are now honors students at Georgia Tech University, one of the best engineering schools in America. Nelson is a computer engineering major and Jhon is a biomedical engineering major.

Tolu Olubumni was brought to the United States from Nigeria as a child.

In 2002, Tolu graduated from a prestigious university in Virginia with a degree in chemical engineering.

It has been nine years since Tolu graduated. She has yet to work a day as a chemical engineer because she is undocumented.

Monji Dolon's parents brought him to the United States from Bangladesh in 1991, when he was 5.

In 2008, Monji graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Now Monji is being courted by the technology industry. He has even been offered a job as the lead engineer for a start-up in Silicon Valley. But he cannot accept the job offers he has received because he is undocumented.

Benita Veliz was brought here in 1993, when she was 8.

Benita graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class at the age of 16.

She graduated from the Honors program at St. Mary's University in Texas with a double major in biology and sociology.

Angelica Hernandez was brought here from Mexico when she was 9.

In high school, she served in Junior R.O.T.C. and was President of the National Honors Society. This spring, she graduated from Arizona State University as the outstanding senior in the Mechanical Engineering Department.

There are many others here today who I would like to introduce, but my time is short.

Let me ask everyone here today who is a DREAM Act student to stand and be recognized.

When I look around this room, I see the future doctors, nurses, scientists, and soldiers who will make this country stronger.

I ask my colleagues to consider the plight of these young people, who find themselves in a legal twilight zone through no fault of their own. They are willing to serve our country, if we would only give them a chance.

Opponents of the DREAM Act always say they sympathize with DREAM Act students. They criticize the details of the bill, but they offer no alternative. Do they want these young people to be deported to countries that they barely remember? Or to continue living in the shadows?

These Dreamers would happily go to the back of the line and wait their turn for citizenship, but there is no line for them to get into.

I urge my colleagues to support the DREAM Act. It is one of the most compelling human rights issues of our time.