



Written Statement of
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Before the U.S. State Judiciary Committee at the hearing entitled
“Dream Deferred: The Urgent Need to Protect Immigrant Youth”

Presented May 8, 2024

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and esteemed members of the Committee,

The last time I stood before this committee was over a decade ago. A decade!

Ten years ago, I was just a young woman with a voice and a dream; I was undocumented and had just received DACA. Today, I stand before you as a proud naturalized United States citizen, representing not just my own journey but the hopes and aspirations of millions like me—dreamers who, despite the challenges we face, continue to believe in America's promise.

As a Dreamer who came to this country at the age of eight, I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to stand here as a citizen of the United States. It was through perseverance, determination, and marrying my college sweetheart that I was able to navigate the complex path to citizenship—a 30-year journey marked by uncertainty but also by hope and resilience.

I will never forget the day of my citizenship ceremony, standing alongside 60 immigrants from 21 countries, reciting the Oath of Allegiance with tears in my eyes, knowing that I was finally recognized as a fellow American. It was a moment of profound gratitude and humility, a testament to the enduring spirit of justice and opportunity of this nation. Yet amidst this appreciation was my humble recognition of how lucky I was; for the vast majority of the Dreamers in America, they don't have a similar opportunity.

As the President and CEO of TheDream.US, the nation's largest college and career success scholarship program for Dreamers, I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of education, helping over 10,000 of our Scholars access higher education over the past decade.

Our Scholars are diverse, coming from over 120 countries around the world, including 1 in 5 of our Scholars who were born in the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, or Europe. Our Scholars also hail from all across the U.S., having graduated from high schools in 45 states and Washington D.C.

More than 4,000 of our Scholars are now college graduates, and 94% of those with DACA and TPS are working. Two thirds are in business, health and medicine, and education. This includes Areli, a teacher and published children's book author who once reflected that, "Every child deserves high quality education that will nurture their academic and personal growth." Dreamers love this country, their home, so much that despite the hefty fees and the fear of what will happen when the DACA program ends, they apply every two years, have their background checked, and keep contributing to the richness of this country without the certainty of permanence.

Areli and the rest of our Scholars are the embodiment of the American Dream. The average age of arrival among TheDream.US Scholars is just four years old, they did their entire

schooling here and graduated from our schools. With a college degree and work authorization – TheDream.US Scholars and alumni are breaking cycles of poverty - 50% are out-earning their parents combined within a year of graduating from college; 1 in 5 are primary providers for their families, with multiple family members depending on their income for basic necessities like rent, food, and utilities; and 1 in 10 are parents, now raising U.S. citizen children who will live in constant anxiety of losing their parents to deportation.

And yet despite their achievements, their talents, and their deeply embedded roots and lives in the U.S., the futures of TheDream.US Scholars and all Dreamers hang in the balance, their dreams deferred by political gridlock and bureaucratic inertia.

The over 800,000 Dreamers who benefited from DACA wasted no time in seizing the opportunity this program gave them. They went to college, joined the military, and in 2020, became essential workers on the frontlines of our country's COVID-19 response. 340,000 DACA recipients were deemed “essential workers” during the pandemic, helping keep America running throughout the crisis.

This includes a TheDream.US alum in Florida who reflected on his work during COVID saying, “Every time I go to work, I bravely gown up and do everything in my power to fight this pandemic and save lives.” He worked more than 80 hours a week as a nurse during the height of the pandemic. Never once did a patient he attended ask or care about his immigration status.

Unfortunately, for Dreamers with and without DACA, their future remains uncertain, their dreams overshadowed by the fear of what will happen when the DACA program ends and the continued inability for younger Dreamers to even apply into the DACA program in the first place. For example, this academic year, we welcomed our largest ever cohort of new TheDream.US Scholars. Three-fourths of them lack DACA status, largely due to ongoing legal challenges that have barred new applicants into the program.

This is not just a policy issue—it's a profound moral test of whether we hold true to the ideals we so proudly proclaim. It is about the kind of nation we want to be: one that empowers the best and brightest within its nation or one that squanders potential in favor of inaction.

A decade has passed since I last stood before this committee, and yet the urgency of this moment has only grown. Senators Durbin and Graham, bless you both for your unwavering commitment to the bipartisan Dream solutions. Let us honor the legacy of those who came before us—Senator Orrin Hatch, Senator John McCain, Senator Richard Lugar, and Senator Harry Reid, and so many others—by finally passing a bi-partisan Dreamer legislation.

Senators, as a former Dreamer and today a fellow American, Dreamers do not seek pity; they seek fairness. They do not look for handouts; they look for the opportunity to give back and fully contribute to the country they have long called home.

As I once walked 1,500 miles from Miami to Washington, D.C., to demonstrate my dedication and love for this country, today, I stand before you, asking you to walk alongside us in a journey towards fairness and recognition. Let us not wait for history to judge our actions but let us be the leaders who pave the way for a brighter future.

I urge you, with the utmost respect and urgency, to pass legislation that aligns with our American ideals. For the teachers, nurses, engineers, psychologists, police officers, for all the thousands of capable, committed young people in our nation, allow for all of them to fully contribute to the nation we all dearly love and to which they belong, not just with their taxes and labor, but as recognized, respected, and legal Americans.

Thank you!

If you would like to learn more details about TheDream.US and evidence of how expanding opportunities for Dreamers is good for their families and the nation as a whole, please find the below details about TheDream.US, as well as several other studies and analyses that offer reminders that the success and potential of TheDream.US Scholars and alumni are only one part of the larger story of the positive impact of DACA and the talents and potential of Dreamers if given a chance to more fully participate in our nation.

- TheDream.US program snapshot ([here](#))
- TheDream.US graduation video ([here](#))
- TheDream.US 2022 Alumni Survey Report in partnership with Golden Door Scholars ([here](#))
- Presidents' Alliance report: Undocumented Students in Higher Education ([here](#))
- Presidents' Alliance report: Immigrant-Origin Students in U.S. Higher Education ([here](#))
- Presidents' Alliance resource: Breakdown of Dreamer Populations ([here](#))
- Niskanen Center Blog: More DACA recipients are homeowners than ever before ([here](#))