

**First Focus Campaign for Children
Statement for the Record**

October 3, 2017

**U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
“Oversight of the Administration’s Decision to End Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals”**

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, we thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the hearing to consider the Administration’s response to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program.

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. As an organization dedicated to promoting the safety and well-being of all children in the United States, we urge Congress to uphold the best interest of the children and families involved in all decisions regarding the long-term impact of immigration policies, including the DACA program.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of the children who were brought to this country at no fault of their own and have grown up only knowing the United States as their home. The United States should not hold children accountable for the decisions of their parents, and rescinding this program does that explicitly. These young people have proven their dedication to this nation, and have shown incredible resilience in their ability to pursue their dreams of becoming productive citizens of the United States. In addition, these young people have continued to further their education, strengthen their job skills, and volunteer to protect their communities all without the certainty of what their future may hold.

The Administration’s decision to end the DACA program was abrupt and set arbitrary deadlines for those with DACA status to renew their status. The policy also places hundreds of thousands of families at risk of deportation and family separation if Congress fails to pass legislation by March 5, 2018. For this reason, it is imperative that Congress act swiftly to pass legislation that provides a permanent solution for immigrants who are caught in the middle of inconsistent federal immigration policies.

The First Focus Campaign for Children supports the passage of the DREAM Act (S.1615/H.R.3440) to create a pathway for immigrants who came here as children to become American citizens. It allows those who entered the U.S. before their 18th birthday and who have been continuously present in the U.S. for 4 years to be granted lawful permanent status. The DREAM Act has provisions that ensure that convicted criminal are not eligible for permanent status and requires immigrants to be pursuing higher education or obtained/working towards a high school diploma or GED. This is a bipartisan, bicameral solution that will help families and children who are already making significant contributions to the United States stay in the country that is their home. In addition, nearly a quarter of current DACA beneficiaries have U.S. citizen children.

Not passing this commonsense legislation increases anxiety, fear and stress in many children who fear losing a parent to deportation and can lead to lifelong trauma and economic hardships for these families.¹

We are pleased that Congress is taking this issue and that there is serious debate and several proposals being put forth by members on both side of the aisle. Most recently, Senators Hatch (R-UT), Lankford (R-OK), and Tillis (R-NC) introduced the SUCCEED Act (S.1852), which also creates a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. However, the requirements to achieve legal status are more stringent in this bill and we believe that it would preclude many innocent families and children from the relief they deserve. It would take an individual 15 years before they would be eligible to apply for citizenship and would prevent those Dreamers with minor non-violent offenses from achieving legal status.

Passing the DREAM Act is also beneficial to the U.S. economy. By providing undocumented individuals legal status, immigrants can contribute and achieve higher incomes. According to the Center for American Progress, passage of the bill would add a total of \$22.7 billion annually to the U.S. GDP and raise the average incomes of all Americans by \$191 annually.²

In addition to swift passage of the DREAM Act, we believe more can be done to ensure the best interests of immigrant children and families. We encourage Congress and the Administration to consider the following when discussing the future of immigration reform:

- **Children should not be penalized or punished for decisions that were made for them.** Ensuring that children have access to safety, education, and health care regardless of immigration status is vital for their well-being as well as beneficial to our national economy.
- **Children should not be used as political deterrence tactics when discussing border security policy.** Threatening to separate families as a deterrence tactic is cruel and further traumatizes children who have experienced traumatic events and extreme hardships. Leadership must work together to find solutions that do not use children as a strategy.
- **Immigration policies should keep families together.** Policies that separate families are detrimental to children and cause harm. Separating families is costly and places additional burdens on the states and federal government.
- **Interior enforcement policies should not use children/young people as bait for raids or targets of enforcement.** Using children in enforcement strategies is cruel and dangerous. It forces children into the shadows and into the precarious situations that we should be rescuing them from.

We thank you again for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. We look forward to working with you to implement common sense policies that will help shape this conversation and ensure that all children thrive in the United States. Should you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Richa Mathur at 202-999-4852 or at richam@firstfocus.org.

¹ “Protecting unauthorized immigrant mothers improves their children’s mental health” Jens Hainmueller, Duncan Lawrence, Linna Martén, Bernard Black, Lucila Figueroa, Michael Hotard, Tomás R. Jiménez, Fernando Mendoza, María I. Rodríguez, Jonas J. Swartz and David D. Laitin <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/sci/early/2017/08/30/science.aan5893.full.pdf>

² “The Economic Benefits of Passing the Dream Act,” Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/09/18/439134/economic-benefits-passing-dream-act/>