

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

While the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744) is a historic step in the right direction for young immigrants, under the bill some of our most vulnerable children would be required to wait more than a decade before they are eligible for citizenship.

The DREAM Act in S.744 provides a 5-year path to citizenship for youth who entered the U.S. prior to age 16, have graduated from high school or earned a GED, and earned a college diploma, attended two years of college, or spent four years in the military. However, the bill does not allow those who entered the U.S. as children but are too young to have graduated from high school or completed a GED to qualify for the 5-year path to citizenship under the DREAM Act. Instead, these children are required to follow the standard adult path to citizenship, which could mean up to a 13-year wait for the youngest children.

WHAT DOES THE AMENDMENT DO?

The Little DREAMers amendment, sponsored by Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), would ensure that young children are not excluded from the DREAM Act's pathway to citizenship simply because of their age. Specifically, the Little DREAMers amendment would allow DREAMers who under the age of 18 upon completing five years of registered provisional status and are still enrolled in school or have completed a GED to adjust to lawfully permanent resident status and be eligible for citizenship. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that nationally **630,000 children currently under the age of 13** could benefit from the Little DREAMers amendment.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG STUDENTS?

The Little DREAMers amendment upholds the guiding principle behind the DREAM Act to do right by children who are growing up in our country and deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Ultimately, allowing our youngest DREAMers to have access to the 5-year path to citizenship under the DREAM Act will ensure that every child in America has the opportunity to achieve his or her dreams. Children who would benefit from this amendment are growing up in our neighborhoods and attending our schools, but with a distinct disadvantage:

- A 2011 study by the Harvard Educational Review confirms this connection by showing that children who live in families impacted by undocumented status are less likely to perform well academically, attend college, or find stable employment, largely as a result of school mobility, isolation, and low levels of participation in important activities that children are eligible for (such as afterschool and other extracurricular activities).
- Children who are not citizens often face significant barriers to accessing higher education, which can lead to students beginning to disengage from school in middle and high school, which also can lead to lower academic achievement, chronic absenteeism, and dropping out. But when higher education becomes an attainable goal, children and youth are more likely to stay in school and work toward that goal.

With 78 percent of students nationwide graduating high school in four years, and 68 percent of high school graduates going to college the next year, it is important to mitigate the above risk factors for Little DREAMers. By taking away the challenges that come with attending school as a noncitizen and making higher education more attainable, the Little DREAMers Amendment will help the country by increasing high school graduation, college entrance, and college graduation rates.

The Little DREAMers amendment is supported by the First Focus Campaign for Children, the National Education Association, United We Dream, and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as a coalition of child advocacy, faith-based, education, labor, and immigrant rights groups.