

New York State DREAM Act

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The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DREAM Act, if supported, would become the pillar of hope for unauthorized youth in search of a better future through education. Though it has not been passed federally, every state can enact their version of the DREAM Act. New York DREAMers have gained momentum towards passing a state DREAM Act and will hopefully set an example for Washington to see. This fact sheet explains the New York State Dream Act, and why we should all support it.

What will the New York State DREAM Act Actually do?

Because citizenship can only be granted by the federal government, the bills before the New York State legislature focus on funding for college-bound undocumented students. Most significantly, this means extending the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), a grant that helps eligible New York residents pay tuition at approved New York State schools. New York students can now receive up to \$5,000 a year in education grants from TAP, but currently a student can only apply if he or she is a “citizen or eligible noncitizen” and “a legal resident of New York State.”

Other bills create commissions to raise private funds for all children of immigrants and to allow undocumented students to open college savings accounts (that have tax benefits) to prepare for college.

What are the benefits for undocumented students?

The benefits for undocumented students include a college education with in-state tuition. The DREAM Act will give students a peace of mind as they continue their studies because they know that they are going to college legally. The added power of a college education will definitely assist undocumented immigrants in the labor market. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, the median earned income of a New York State worker with a bachelor’s degree is \$25,000 *higher per year* than for a worker with just a high school diploma.

But besides monetary gain, the legislation would give many young people a chance to pursue their dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, lawyers, and countless other leadership positions. The DREAM Act provides the chance of nurturing the potential of many talented students who can make a difference in our future.

Who would be eligible for it?

The New York DREAM Act is created specifically for undocumented New York high school students. Under the proposed bill, to be eligible for TAP a student must:

1. Have graduated from a New York High school with a high school diploma or an equivalent, including but not limited to a GED.
2. Have entered the United States before the age of 18.
3. Be under the age of 35
4. Not have been convicted in this state or any other state or territory of a violent felony.

Ok, financial assistance seems important, but how much does college cost anyways?

SUNY, or The State University of New York, is a system of public institutions of higher education here in New York. For undergraduates, the total in-state tuition cost for students living on campus this year is about \$21,120, including tuition, student fees, room and board, books and supplies, personal expenses, and transportation. Commuter students will pay about \$14,760 a year. Out of state students pay about \$30,170. For community colleges in the SUNY system, students who live on campus pay about \$16,790 per year, commuter students pay \$11,710 per year, and out of state students pay about \$20,900.

The cost of going to a CUNY (City University of New York) school— the public university system of New York City, generally costs less than that of SUNY. Full time students at four year CUNY schools pay \$5,130 a year and at community colleges pay \$3,600.

Sounds like a hefty bill, how much would it all cost the state?

Although a SUNY education can run up to \$21,120 a year, TAP only gives up to \$5,000 a year for eligible students, largely based on their need. Expanding the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) as proposed in the DREAM bills would increase the cost of the program by only 2%. It's hard to calculate an exact number of eligible undocumented students, but the Fiscal Policy Institute estimates that extending TAP would cost about 17 million dollars. Although that sounds like a huge amount of money, it is only 2% of the \$885 million dollars TAP provided New York students in the 2010-2011 school year.

What are the benefits of the bill for the state?

Although it may not seem like there aren't any benefits of the DREAM Act for the state, that is simply not true. The result of the DREAM Act will be a more educated labor force as there will be more college graduates who will be equipped with skills to work better paying jobs. In return, the state will receive more in income taxes, making the New York DREAM Act an investment in the state's economy. Not only that, but a more highly educated, productive labor force attracts business to the state.

Who supports this bill?

Besides the hundreds of students that fully support the bill, politicians and legislators have also acknowledged the benefits of the bill. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and City Council speaker Christine Quinn have given their approval for a New York DREAM Act. So have institutions like SUNY and Sarah Lawrence College. Countless organizations have pledged support including New York State Higher Education, the New York Immigration Coalition, Kids for College, Children's Defense Fund, Local 1199 of SEIU, the Chinese Progressive Association, the New York Civic Participation Project, New York State Youth Leadership Council, The Black Institute, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Latino Justice and many more.

Why should we support this bill?

We should support the NY DREAM Act because it's the right thing to do. Those of us who were born American citizens and whose parents have come here legally are just lucky. It has nothing to do with our country of origin, or how hard we work or even our economic status. It is pure chance that we are born documented citizens of America and are therefore "entitled" to our freedoms.

Every one of us is, or is the descendant of, an immigrant to this country. People come to the United States of America for the hope of improving the quality of their lives. The young people who depend on the passage of the DREAM Act are no different. Most had no choice to be in the position they are in.

The bill benefits the state, the people, and even the country. There is no real reason not to support the DREAM Act, and many who don't have nativist fears or xenophobic sentiments.

Personally, as a member of the Model United Nations club, I do not believe in denying the right to a better education for anyone. Through education, we can all learn to become a more united world and to learn to understand one another. It starts here in New York with the DREAM Act.

For More Information...

- On TAP: http://www.hesc.com/content.nsf/SFC/About_TAP
- On the New York State DREAM Act: http://www.thenyic.org/sites/default/files/DREAM_Factsheet%203.pdf and http://www.thenyic.org/sites/default/files/DREAM_BillOverview.pdf
- On SUNY and CUNY Costs: http://www.suny.edu/student/paying_tuition.cfm and <http://www.cuny.edu/admissions/financial-aid/estimating-costs/tuition-fees.html>
- On the cost of the NY DREAM Act: <http://www.nydreamact.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/FPI-DREAM-Act-cost-benefit-analysis.pdf>