

PRESIDENTS' ALLIANCE | **ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND IMMIGRATION**

Statement for the Record

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For a Hearing of the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Dream Deferred: The Urgent Need to Protect Immigrant Youth

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 10:00 A.M.
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 106

As students prepare to graduate across our nation's universities and colleges, we are pleased to submit this statement for the record on behalf of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. The nonpartisan, nonprofit Presidents' Alliance brings over 550 leaders of public and private colleges and universities together on the immigration issues that impact higher education, students, campuses, communities, and the nation. Our members lead every type of nonprofit higher education institution, including private colleges and universities, large public universities, community colleges, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and faith-based institutions. Our member campuses represent the full diversity of the higher education sector, enrolling over five million students across 42 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

As of 2021, more than 408,000 undocumented students were enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States.¹ Dreamers, who have grown up in the United States and are attending or have graduated from American colleges and universities, are integral members of our campuses and make essential contributions as students, alumni, faculty, and staff. This week, thousands of Dreamers will graduate from colleges and universities across the country. While many of these students arrived in the United States at a young age, only a quarter are estimated to qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.² This hearing presents a long-overdue opportunity to highlight the contributions of the Dreamer population not only to higher education, but to the nation as a whole. With broad public support across party lines for passing a permanent solution for Dreamers, now is the time to reach a bipartisan compromise. The looming possibility of a termination of DACA heightens the urgency for Congress to act on a permanent legislative solution for all Dreamers, including those with and without DACA or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

The American public overwhelmingly favors permanent relief for Dreamers, and it is concerning to see Congress backing away from what was previously a bipartisan commitment to permanent relief.³ However, we are encouraged by the reintroduction of the bipartisan Dream Act, sponsored by Chair Durbin and Ranking Member Graham.⁴

¹ Steven Hubbard & Miriam Feldblum, Undocumented Students in Higher Education: How Many Students Are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They? 3 (Aug. 2023), www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/07.23-Undocumented-Students_v3.pdf.

² *Id.*

³ Michelle Hackamn & Aaron Zitner, *Americans Want the Immigration Bill Congress Won't Pass*, *WSJ Poll Shows*, Wall St. J. (Mar. 7, 2024), www.wsj.com/politics/policy/americans-want-the-immigration-bill-congress-wont-pass-wsj-poll-shows-227b9bb8; Letter from Presidents' Alliance Steering Committee to the President, Vice President, Speaker, and Congressional Leaders (Feb. 12, 2024), www.presidentsalliance.org/presidents-alliance-steering-committees-letter-to-white-house-and-congress-for-inclusion-of-relief-for-dreamers-in-any-bipartisan-immigration-reform.

⁴ Presidents' Alliance Applauds Reintroduction of Bipartisan Dream Act Sponsored by Senators Durbin and Graham (Feb. 10, 2023), www.presidentsalliance.org/press/presidents-alliance-applauds-reintroduction-of-bipartisan-dream-act-sponsored-by-senators-durbin-and-graham.

The permanent relief this legislation would provide Dreamers is needed now more than ever, as the approval of new DACA applications is enjoined and the viability of its protections for existing recipients rests precariously on a series of forthcoming decisions in the *Texas v. United States* litigation.⁵ The Presidents' Alliance submitted a friend of the court brief, joined by 168 organizations and institutions, in support of DACA in the federal government's appeal of Judge Hanen's most recent ruling, highlighting the critical contributions of DACA recipients and the economic and national security costs of ending the program.⁶

A failure by Congress to provide permanent relief for Dreamers would be devastating to the American economy, its communities, and its families. We urge Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to avoid this disastrous outcome.

Dreamers' Importance to Essential Workforces & American Innovation

Dreamers pursue and graduate from undergraduate and graduate education programs in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, and enter positions in healthcare, teaching, and business, critical fields that currently face severe labor shortages.⁷ Many Dreamers also can attest to their desire to enlist in the U.S. Armed Forces to serve our country in uniform.

More than 75 percent of DACA recipients in the workforce—nearly 350,000—were employed in jobs deemed essential by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.⁸ This includes workforces needed to fully realize the benefits of the recently passed CHIPS and Science Act.⁹ A failure to provide relief for Dreamers, including DACA recipients, impacts the future of our economy, and losing this “capable workforce” threatens national security interests as well, hampering the nation's “ability to be competitive and defend itself.”¹⁰ If and when DACA is eliminated, an estimated 1,000 U.S. jobs will be lost every business day over two years.¹¹

⁵ Post-DACA Ruling: While Urging Long Overdue Congressional Action, Here's What Higher Ed, the Biden Administration, and State Leaders Can Do for Dreamers in Interim (Sept. 14, 2023), www.presidentsalliance.org/press/post-daca-ruling-while-urging-long-overdue-congressional-action-heres-what-higher-ed-the-biden-administration-and-state-leaders-can-do-for-dreamers-in-interim.

⁶ Brief of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration as Amicus Curiae Supporting Defendants-Appellants, *Texas v. United States*, No. 23-40653 (5th Cir. Feb. 1, 2024), www.presidentsalliance.org/state-of-texas-v-united-states-amicus-brief.

⁷ Steven Hubbard & Miriam Feldblum, *supra* note 1 at 9.

⁸ *New CAP Data Confirm DACA is a Positive Force for Recipients and their Families*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Nov. 24, 2021),

www.americanprogress.org/press/release-new-cap-data-confirm-daca-is-a-positive-force-for-recipients-and-their-families.

⁹ Margaret Stock & Theresa Cardinal Brown, Council on Nat'l Sec. & Immigr., Meeting National Security Interests Requires Workers 1 (2023),

www.cnsiusa.org/files/ugd/5b8edc_d60882d303bo4b3d884394f1e3d192cd.pdf.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Phillip Connor, *What happens if DACA ends?*, FWD.us (Aug. 22, 2022), www.fwd.us/news/what-if-daca-ends.

Dreamers bring diverse skills, experiences, and perspectives that make our campuses, organizations, and workplaces more dynamic and more likely to facilitate innovation. On our campuses, this can enhance collaborative learning and problem-solving, preparing future workers to navigate a globalized economy. The top 12 states where undocumented students in higher education live are: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Maryland, Georgia, Virginia, Washington, and Arizona.¹² While most undocumented students in higher education are concentrated in these states, a significant number also live in other states, including Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Indiana, Utah, Ohio, Connecticut, Nevada, Kansas, and Missouri.¹³

Most undocumented students who are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities arrived in the country as young children or youth, and among DACA-eligible students in colleges and universities, close to nine out of ten (85.2%) arrived as young children (ages 0-9).¹⁴ In addition, while the majority of undocumented students are pursuing undergraduate degrees, our research confirms that a growing number are also pursuing advanced degrees, including 19.3% of DACA-eligible students, which represents a 6.5% increase since 2019.¹⁵ Among fields of study, more than a third (37.1%) of DACA-eligible students pursuing advanced degrees have an undergraduate degree in a STEM field, and among those students, 30.5% have pursued a degree in a healthcare-related field.¹⁶ This is an especially important finding given our nation's critical need for professionals and workers in healthcare and technology, and what these fields mean for our national security and welfare.

Dreamers' Significant Economic Contributions

Dreamers have proven themselves to be powerful contributors to the economies of their cities, states, and the national economy. Over 12,000 DACA recipients count themselves as entrepreneurs, running businesses that provide employment to other members of their communities.¹⁷ DACA recipients—as both employers and employees—pay local, state, and federal taxes on approximately \$27.9 billion in annual wages, providing almost \$2.1 billion to Social Security and Medicare.¹⁸ Annually, DACA recipients

¹² Steven Hubbard & Miriam Feldblum, *supra* note 1 at 6.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.* at 5.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 8.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 9.

¹⁷ Rosa Barrientos-Ferrer, Silva Mathema & Trinh Q. Truong, *Despite Barriers, DACA Entrepreneurs Contribute To Their Communities*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Jan 25, 2024), www.americanprogress.org/article/despite-barriers-daca-entrepreneurs-contribute-to-their-communities.

¹⁸ Trinh Q. Truong & Silva Mathema, *DACA Recipients Bolster Social Security and Medicare*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Jan. 25, 2024), www.americanprogress.org/article/daca-recipients-bolster-social-security-and-medicare.

contribute \$760 million in mortgage payments and \$2.5 billion in rental payments.¹⁹ Ending DACA would result in significant economic losses, but extending permanent protections and work authorization to Dreamers with and without DACA could allow more individuals to contribute to the economy as entrepreneurs, employees, and taxpayers.

Dreamers' Contributions to the Presidents' Alliance

Finally, at the Presidents' Alliance, approximately 70% of our employees are first generation immigrants, including individuals, currently or previously, directly impacted by the immigration policies discussed at this hearing. We and our member institutions have benefited greatly from the talent, expertise, contributions, and work of these employees. We highlight three staff members below:

Dr. Felecia Russell, Ed.D., Director of the Higher Ed Immigration Portal. Dr. Russell received her Bachelor of Arts at California Lutheran University; a Master of Public Policy from Pepperdine University School of Public Policy; and a Doctorate of Education from Temple University, College of Education and Human Development. She is the author of *Amplifying Black Undocumented Student Voices in Higher Education* (2024). On DACA, Felicia has said, "I remember sitting at home with tears falling from my eyes because I knew DACA meant I could legally work in the country that I consider my home. With DACA, many doors opened for me; I went on to earn my master's and my doctorate, a privilege I know not all undocumented people have. Through higher education, I have created a wonderful life for myself and my family. However, I live my life in two-year increments because DACA is a band-aid and not a permanent fix. While DACA has created so many opportunities, we need to build on its successes to pass legislation to provide a permanent path for Dreamers to fully participate and thrive in America."²⁰

Ivana Lopez Espinosa, M.A., Project Associate, Campus Engagement. Ivana received her Bachelor of Arts at Gettysburg College and a Masters of Art from University of Michigan, Rackham Graduate School. While Ivana currently calls Detroit, Michigan home, she was raised between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Around high school, her family settled down in South Central Pennsylvania where she quickly realized that her status may impact her goals of attending college. When DACA became legal in 2012, Ivana joined community efforts to help eligible community members to file their DACA paperwork. Her volunteer

¹⁹ Nicole Prchal Svajlenka & Trihn Q. Truong, *The Demographic and Economic Impacts of DACA Recipients: Fall 2021 Edition*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Nov. 24, 2021), www.americanprogress.org/article/the-demographic-and-economic-impacts-of-daca-recipients-fall-2021-edition.

²⁰ On DACA Anniversary, Presidents' Alliance Urges Legislative Solution and Highlights Ways Administration, States, and Higher Ed Can Support Dreamers, Presidents' Alliance (June 14, 2023), www.presidentsalliance.org/press/dacaanniversary2023.

hours began often wrapped up around midnight to ensure no one was turned away. She was eligible for DACA in 2013 which opened doors to work and ultimately a path to pursue higher education. She graduated from Gettysburg College with a B.A. in Sociology and spent her years honing musical talent at the Sunderman Conservatory of Music. Her undergraduate experience ignited a passion for higher education. Ivana went on to receive a M.A. in Higher Education from the University of Michigan. As a graduate student, she took on multiple leadership roles and co-founded Puentes, a graduate student organization that uplifts the graduate Latine community. Her engagement allowed her to see the intersection of public health, social work, and law in higher education through rigorous coursework and fellowships. Due to her lived and educational experiences, she brings in a breadth of expertise while supporting over 190 higher education practitioners working with undocumented students across the United States. In her role, she identifies ongoing challenges undocumented students face in higher education and creates space for collaborative brainstorming, thought-leadership, and resource development.

Jason Koh, Senior Communications Manager. Jason received his Bachelor of Arts at the State University of New York at Albany. Jason previously served in the national service program AmeriCorps as a VISTA member, providing communications support for grassroots organizations in Queens, New York. Through his years in academia and advocacy for immigrant rights, he has come to understand that the people who are closest and most intimately connected to issues are the ones who often possess the solutions. But, he also witnessed firsthand some of the barriers they face—lack of resources, expertise, and technical skills—that may hinder their ability to amplify their voices to a broader audience. His current career path has been driven by a deep-seated motivation to bridge this gap. He wants to leverage his skills and experience as a former DACA recipient to make sure that the wider American public not only hears the stories of those who are undocumented and DACAmented but also empathizes with their struggles and champions their causes.

Thank you for the Committee's consideration of this urgent matter. If you have any questions, please contact Diego Sánchez, Director of Policy and Strategy, at diego@presidentsalliance.org.