

## Undocumented Students Urge Passage of DREAM ACT

by Margaret Kamara  
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"I worry, perhaps irrationally, that [speaking in this public forum] might have a negative impact on my case," Martine Mwanj Kalaw told a congressional panel at a hearing on the future of undocumented immigrant students. "But it is my obligation to do what I can to prevent this anguish for other students...help them by making it more likely that the DREAM act will become law this year."

Kalaw, who has been living in the United States for 22 years, was one of three students who shared their stories with a House judiciary subcommittee in hopes of getting support for passage of the "Develop, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act" before they are deported to countries they were born in but do not consider home.

These students were chosen because their cases were already publicized through their advocacy in their communities.

The DREAM Act was reintroduced in Congress in March. If passed, the law would leave it to the states to determine whether to allow U.S.-raised undocumented students, ages 12 and older, to enjoy the same benefits for higher education as any other resident student.

The law would strike a section of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996, a federal law that requires states that provide in-state tuition rates to undocumented student to do the same for out-of state students.

Ten states currently offer undocumented students in-state tuition rates; California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Utah and Washington.

California and Texas are one of the four "majority-minority" states, according to the U.S. Census report released last week.

The bill has its share of critics, including University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor Kris W. Kobach.

"This is a slap in the face to the law-abiding American citizen from out of state," Kobach said. "This discriminatory treatment is particularly harmful in a time when the price of a four-year college education is beyond the reach of many U.S. citizens."

Kobach, part of the senior counsel panel of speakers, said the DREAM Act is bad policy; it not only discriminates against U.S. citizens, but will put a heavy burden on tax payers, and encourages illegal immigrants to violate the law.

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., who co-authored the bill, said undocumented students, who are brought to the United States through no fault of their own, should not be punished.

"These kids are a tremendous asset to the country. They bring needed value, talent and help maintain the quality of life in the future of the U.S. It'll be tragic for us to punish innocent children and their ability to excel and give back to the community."

Some members of the House judiciary subcommittee sympathized with the students, and reassured them with their personal stories.

“While listening to your stories, I realize that I am not much different from you,” said Rep. Linda T. Sanchez, D-Calif. “The only difference is that I have a piece of paper that tells me I am a citizen; I can vote, practice law, run for Congress...I see what you can do if you were just given a chance.”

Said Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass.: “Children need protection, your stories reinforce that. We hear about the rule of law...law is a process of change and a reflection of moral. Would it be moral to send these three to a place where they don’t speak the language or know the culture?”

Others, though they applauded the students for their testimonies, were not convinced the proposed law would benefit existing U.S. citizens.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, using a ship analogy, said as the new Census report shows, the United States is very populated, and therefore having undocumented immigrants can be a flop, cause the ship to sink, especially if 7 out of 12 are unemployed.

--Margaret Kamara