

Dear Senators Hagan and Burr,

As immigration scholars across the state of North Carolina, we implore you to follow the lead of the U.S. House of Representatives and pass The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, HR6497.

As we wait for a desperately needed overhaul of our immigration system, this Act corrects a cruel reality, which is the absence of a path to legal status for children who have earned a college degree, but who are undocumented due to their parents' actions. This bill is popular among the majority of voters across the two major parties, and has been endorsed by chancellors and presidents of more than 73 universities and colleges across the United States. UCLA's North American Integration and Development Center estimates that this bill could add \$3.6 trillion in income across the next forty years, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that it would reduce the deficit by \$1.4 billion in ten years. Further, deportation of these young people would cost billions to taxpayers, and most of the deportees would land in an unfamiliar country with no immediate family.

Who are the undocumented? As many as 40 percent of the country's undocumented population did not cross a border without papers, but have overstayed a visa. The undocumented not only include Latin Americans, but Europeans, Africans, Asians, and even Canadians. They include individuals whose smugglers misled them into thinking they had legal documents; those who had to quickly escape trouble in their country; those who were documented but fell out of status because of an administrative glitch; those who applied for asylum but were unsuccessful; those whose employer sponsors who fell behind on paperwork; individuals who left abusive spouses but are not aware of legal relief under the Violence Against Women Act. Until just this year, they included widows and widowers whose legal status derived from their spouses.

Who are the children of the undocumented adults? They were brought to this country when they were as young as infants. For many, this is the only country they know, and English is the only language that they know.

Tea-partyers and others who fill our public sphere with nativist and xenophobic rants do not remind us of our country's "higher self" to which our president implored us to aspire in his inaugural address. When those rants speak in the name of religion, they do not remind us of the principles of religions with which we are familiar, nor do they represent the faith-based institutions and leaders across the country who welcome and defend the rights of the undocumented in their congregations and communities.

What would the consequences of the DREAM Act be? Does it mean closing educational spots for the native-born? We do not think so, as American higher education has usually expanded to meet the need. Does it mean our native-born children would compete with the Chinese children who are blowing the lid off of the top of test scores? Maybe. Is that a bad thing? At the global level, isn't that what our leaders are bemoaning—that American students are outperformed? In the meantime, as educators, we can broaden those test-score-oriented students' experiences to include problem-solving and critical thinking. The United States has a proud history of creating

educational institutions and programs to open pathways into our society for immigrants; witness the model of the City University of New York.

What would the consequences be if we continue to live without a DREAM Act? A growing stream of new adults in our population who are ineligible to work legally, who will live in constant fear of law enforcement, who cannot hold drivers' licenses, and who cannot contribute their leadership skills to our state's businesses, schools, universities, cultural fields, and governing bodies. We will lose dollars from potential taxpayers whose earnings will remain at poverty-line levels. We could face higher numbers of high-school and college dropouts (and loss of taxpayer funds that paid their schooling), some of whom could be lured into underground activities just to survive.

Does this seem like a radical proposal? Maybe. But so did the 19th amendment that granted women the right to vote, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. If you had been in the Senate for those votes, in which column would you have wanted your name to be recorded for posterity?

When four young freshmen dared arrest and possible death by sitting in at a Greensboro Woolworth lunch counter on February 1, 1960, a new direction was galvanized for the Civil Rights movement. North Carolinians went down in history for these radical activities. When three other North Carolinians, Rosario Lopez, Loida Silva, and Viridiana Martinez, went on a hunger strike in the summer of 2010 to support the DREAM Act, they demonstrated the depth of their commitment by also putting their own health at risk. They are placing themselves in a proud tradition.

These are not students looking for a handout. These are hardworking students, many of whom are graduating with honors and as valedictorians of their classes. They want the opportunity to work. Someday, if the DREAM Act passes, these children will be your electoral constituents, as will be their parents. Certainly, their future children will be your constituents, and will be able to run for office themselves. What legacy would you like to leave for your future constituents?

North Carolina touts Higher Education as one of its proudest home industries. This state granted 62,297 post-secondary degrees in 2009. Our state is in a position to be a leader that promotes our educational institutions as both fair and just, and as a platform for training the best and brightest—regardless of immigration status. Our message to the brave and tireless DREAM Act advocates is the reminder from Martin Luther King, Jr. that “The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice.” As our senators, you can help bend that arc forward even further.

The following scholars support the DREAM Act:

Susan C. Pearce, Sociology, East Carolina University

Robert Lee Maril, Sociology, East Carolina University

Leon Wilson, Sociology, East Carolina University

Sloane Burke, Health Education, East Carolina University

Jacqueline Hagan, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Sociology, Duke University

Kyle Crowder, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Kim Larson, School of Nursing, East Carolina University

Deborah Weissman, School of Law, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Cameron D. Lippard, Sociology, Appalachian State University

Stephen J. Sills, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Ricardo B. Contreras, Anthropology, East Carolina University

David C. Griffith, Anthropology, East Carolina University

Mary Nyangweso Wangila, Religious Studies, East Carolina University

Mimi Chapman, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Trude Bennett, Maternal and Child Health, School of Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Kim Ebert, Sociology and Anthropology, North Carolina State University

Heon Cheol Lee, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Asheville

Jeffery Popke, Geography, East Carolina University

Darlene Rodriguez, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Rebecca Powers, Sociology, East Carolina University

Don Bradley, Sociology, East Carolina University

Joanna Bradley, Foreign Languages and Literatures, East Carolina University

Jennifer M. Valko, Foreign Languages and Literatures, East Carolina University

Josh Hinson, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill