

# The American DREAM Left in Legislative Limbo for Thousands of High School Graduates



By Jerry Grzeca and John Sesini  
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Just last month, the House of Representatives approved the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors [DREAM] Act. The DREAM Act is bipartisan legislation that addresses the situation faced by many young people who were brought to the United States years ago as undocumented, immigrant children and who have since attended U.S. schools. The act would permit these individuals to pursue a path toward lawful, permanent residency after completing two years in college or the military. On December 18, the Senate fell five votes short of the 60 needed to advance the bill past Republican opposition, leaving the DREAM Act and the dreams of thousands of high school graduates in legislative limbo.

Many groups, both in Wisconsin and nationally, are disheartened at Congress' refusal to pass this important legislation. The Migration Policy Institute says that the measure would have immediately favored more than 700,000 young people who were under 16 years of age when they first arrived in the U.S., have been here at least five years, have a U.S. high school diploma or equivalent and have no criminal background. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that more than 50,000 college-eligible undocumented immigrants who graduate from U.S. high schools every year will now face even more significant barriers to higher education and employment.

President Obama and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus lawmakers "discussed their deep disappointment with the failing of the DREAM Act in the U.S. Senate despite having the support of a majority of Senators and a majority of the American people, noting that the act would have cut the budget deficit by \$2.2 billion over the next 10 years," the White House said.

Failure to pass the DREAM Act will have a significant impact on the U.S.'s ability to remain competitive in today's global economy. A conservative estimate finds that the average DREAM Act beneficiary student will earn \$1 million more over his or her lifetime simply by obtaining legal status. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan states that passing the DREAM Act would "play an important part in the nation's efforts to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020." According to a recent UCLA study, students impacted by the DREAM Act could add between \$1.4 to \$3.6 trillion in taxable income to our economy over the course of their careers.

Congress' refusal to pass the DREAM Act has left another entire class of outstanding high school graduates without a plan for the future. Gaby Pacheco, who was the highest ranked J-ROTC student in her high school and president of her college student government, will never live her dream of working with special needs students. David Cho, who graduated with a 3.9 GPA, plays seven instruments and is a drum major at UCLA, will never get his opportunity to serve in the Air Force. Elizabeth Lee, a recent Lowell High School graduate, whose family is facing deportation in January, will never go on to earn her Bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California.

This tragedy has caused America to lose a vital asset: an educated class of promising immigrant students who have demonstrated a commitment to hard work and a strong desire to contribute to our society. Let us continue to appeal to Congress and our local legislatures to give these hopeful young adults a chance to achieve their dreams. Please visit [www.contactingthecongress.org](http://www.contactingthecongress.org) to find local congressional contact information.

For more information about the DREAM Act or for information about how to obtain a visa or residency, please contact Grzeca Law Group at (414) 342-3000 or visit our website at [www.grzecalaw.com](http://www.grzecalaw.com).

**"Today we mourn, but tomorrow we shift back into gear to fight for justice and inclusion in America,"**  
– Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-III.

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