



IMMIGRATION: DREAM ACT FOR MARYLAND'S IMMIGRANT YOUTH

October 2011

Overview

America is unique. We are a land of immigrants and our Church has always been a leading advocate for those who are new to our shores. As Catholics, we are called to help lift up all people; and as Americans, we seek to make America stronger and healthier for future generations. The DREAM Act does both.

The Catholic Church has long advocated for legislation which the Maryland General Assembly passed this year to provide in-state college tuition rates to Maryland's immigrant children, whether legal or illegal in status, who:

- Spent three years of high school in Maryland and graduated;
- Paid or whose parent/ guardian has paid Maryland state income taxes for each of those three years of high school and who will pay for each year in college;
- Are academically-eligible;
- Apply first to community colleges; and
- Will not displace any Maryland resident applying for college.

This new law should be celebrated by all as a just, practical, and humane way to allow these young men and women to continue their education, and to join their Maryland classmates in maximizing their God-given talents.

1. What is the DREAM Act?

The Maryland DREAM Act provides tuition equity for all

students who have been residing in Maryland for at least three years while attending high school. This new law will enable young people to afford a college education at the in-state tuition rate and contribute to their community. For many, America is the only home they know. These young people live in our neighborhoods, are our children's friends and classmates, receive communion with us at Mass.

2. Does this law only help illegal immigrants?

No. The DREAM Act also benefits those who are awaiting some form of immigration relief, such as asylum applicants. This can be a long process.

In addition, the DREAM Act benefits our military families living in Maryland, as well as veterans who register within four years of discharge.

3. Why is the Catholic Church getting involved?

Our faith calls us to embrace all, even the 'stranger,' because Christ dwells in us all. "To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a duty of hospitality and fidelity to Christian identity itself," said Blessed John Paul II in *Undocumented Immigrants*. Our starting point in deciding how society should treat an individual is not their legal status, but rather their human dignity.

For many of us, our grandparents and forefathers left their homes in

Ireland, Italy, Germany and Poland searching for a better life. They were not deterred by the complicated and broken immigration process that exists today. Many did not come with documents. They came out of need and hope for a better future.

4. Isn't the Church supporting breaking the law?

The Church does not condone breaking the law, does not support "open borders," and fully recognizes the legitimate concerns our state and country face regarding illegal immigration. These problems cannot be solved, however, by harshly denying the needs of those who live and work among us here and now, especially the young.

The in-state tuition law is a balanced measure that benefits immigrant children who are making the right choices in order to lead productive lives. They did not come to America on their own. They were children following their parents or aunts and uncles. As children, we would have done just the same.

5. Why give them a break when they don't pay taxes?

To be eligible for the DREAM Act, students must prove that they or their guardian/family have paid state income taxes for at least their three years of high school and any intervening years before entering college. They also must prove that they or their guardian/family are

paying income taxes while they are attending college.

Students who are undocumented cannot receive any federal or state scholarships or financial assistance.

6. Isn't the new law unconstitutional?

Maryland is the twelfth state to pass an in-state tuition law, including California, Texas, Utah and Oklahoma. In June 2011, the United States Supreme Court declined to take a case challenging the California law.

7. Can Maryland afford this new law?

While it is estimated that the DREAM Act may cost \$778,000 in 2014 and increasing to \$3.5 million in 2016, overall the law will result in greater economic and tax benefits. Also any short-term fiscal impact will be offset by higher tax revenues in the long-term due to increased tuition and enrollment fees that the educational institutions would not have received otherwise.

According to the Department of Legislative Services, "Public four-year institutions have considerable autonomy over admissions and generally maintain fairly stable proportions of in-state and out-of-state students. The bill does not affect that autonomy. Therefore, despite the differences in tuition levels for in-state and out-of-state students, tuition revenues at most institutions will not be materially affected." And, "Overall, it is assumed that the bill has a negligible net impact on total community college tuition revenues."

8. Won't they take slots away from our children?

These immigrant students and students from military families will

not take seats from Maryland residents. Their seats cannot be counted among the seats the University of Maryland system reserves for in-state resident students. In addition, they must apply at first to community colleges, which have open enrollments. After two years, the students then are eligible – if they qualify academically – to apply to state universities at the in-state tuition rate. Also, they are not eligible to receive any federal or state scholarships or financial assistance.

Vote to support the DREAM Act.

You will be able to show your support for all of Maryland's young people when you go to the polls in November 2012. It is expected that a statewide referendum will be on the ballot trying to repeal the DREAM Act. Please vote against this referendum, which will have a needlessly divisive impact on our state.

Our Catholic faith calls us to respond to immigrants with generosity – to welcome the stranger. In making these students eligible for in-state tuition, the DREAM Act makes college possible for a new generation of immigrant Marylanders. Maryland is their reality – their past, present and, they hope, their future. The DREAM Act gives young people one of America's most prized gifts – opportunity.



Our call as Christians

"Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. For Christians, the migrant is not merely an individual to be respected in accordance with the norms established by law, but a person whose presence challenges them and whose needs become an obligation for their responsibility."

Blessed John Paul II

Undocumented Immigrants
Message for World Migration Day,
1996

"What would this country have amounted to as a nation had its founders immediately after the Revolution closed its portals to honest but illiterate immigration? Many of the nation's greatest men in every field of service were immigrants or the sons of immigrants. We still cherish the hope that this is 'the land of the free and home of the brave,' and the refuge of those honest and virtuous men and women who conscientiously believe the land which gave them birth does not give them the rights or advantages that good men crave to live peacefully and well."

Cardinal James Gibbons

Responding to calls for a national literacy test for immigrants,
1915