

## **UCLA Student Body President Speaks Out on the DREAM Act**

July 28, 2010

For more than a week on the corner of Santa Monica and Sepulveda Boulevard, 8 brave students have committed to going hungry until Senator Feinstein pushes the DREAM Act from the judiciary committee to a vote in the Senate. Until the Senator offers a written commitment to use her seat on the judiciary committee as a space to not only support, but CHAMPION the DREAM Act the students will not leave. Today, I joined the students and began my fast for the DREAM. I write to ask you for your support; not only that you get educated about the issue but that you would take the few small steps to push the bill forward.

The DREAM Act is a bipartisan bill that will allow some undocumented students in the United States the opportunity for conditional citizenship. Without the DREAM Act, students who have lived in the US for most of their lives and proven themselves to be dedicated, steadfast individuals will still not have the opportunity to attain the American dream. These students are ineligible for financial aid, ineligible to work (you cannot get hired without a Social Security number), and ineligible to pursue a career even if they somehow find a way to finance their education. Studies have shown that these tax-paying individuals already contribute positively to the economy and would only benefit the US financial situation by being granted opportunity to receive an education and contribute to the work force. Additionally, all students pay fees – the close to 200 undocumented students at UCLA pay the same 33% of their tuition towards financial aid like every other student. Still their legalization status says that while they contribute to the pot of financial aid – they are not allowed to take from it.

The current climate in states like Arizona has political figures scratching for comprehensive immigration reform solutions. However, no bill but the DREAM Act has even a chance at passing this year – no other piece of legislation has the same kind of bipartisan support. As a matter of fact, the DREAM Act is less about immigration reform and more about recognizing what is right and fair. The DREAM Act requires that students have lived in the United States for a minimum of six years, have demonstrated good character, have received a GED or diploma from an American high school, and attend a 2/4-year university. These strict stipulations will by no means solve the issues of our immigration system but the DREAM will support those students who are being penalized at the hand of a broken system.

Some may ask why I am here. What does a middle-class, documented, Afrikan-American woman have to gain by pushing forward the DREAM Act? First, I hope to that the support of allies will show that this issue goes much further than being a concern of the undocumented or Chican@ population (reality is that most undocumented people in the US are from the API community). The DREAM Act is fundamentally about providing access to education for all people. I am a firm believer that education is a right and not a privilege.

Looking at the struggle of underrepresented and lower-class peoples for years now, it is clear to me that access is one of THE modern-day civil rights issues of our time. More than 40 years ago, civil rights leaders fought for desegregation and other forms of equal access. The more radical Black Panther Party recognized in their 10-point platform that all humans deserved the basic rights to food, shelter, income and education. Today this struggle clearly continues.

Additionally as a representative of all students, I see that the fight for education and the DREAM Act has been one of the key components of the modern-day student movement. For ten years now, students have organized, lobbied and demonstrated in order to push the bill forward. This year, the DREAM Act has gained more attention than ever before and stands with more co-sponsors in the House and Senate than ever – all because of the hard work of students. The United States Student Association, with its over 400,000 members decided to choose the DREAM Act as its primary issue for two years in a row. Groups like IDEAS at UCLA and the Bruin Democrats have championed the bill on our campus. As an elected official who believes that student government has a responsibility to listen to the concerns of our students and fight for social justice – it only makes sense that the DREAM Act be apart of our agenda. I have been quoted at saying that student government at UCLA can be the stuff that changes lives – by fighting for the opportunity for all students to be at UCLA - how much more relevant and life changing could we be?

Finally I'm here because on a legal level – I hope to use my voice to potentially speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Undocumented students can't vote. So while the DREAM Act represents one of the most influential and important pieces of legislation to affect their lives, they can't even participate in the political process in order to see it passed. That's why allies like you and I must not just stand in solidarity, but move in support of what we know to be right. The same kind of injustices undocumented students face represents the kinds of blockades underrepresented communities have faced for years – a win for one of our communities is a success for us all.

With this in mind, I have joined the strike and have committed to fast for the next few days. Those who have participated for the full eight days are tired but in good spirits. They are quickly loosing weight -hopefully Senator Feinstein will commit to pushing the DREAM ACT out of Judiciary soon. We have been receiving more media coverage everyday and positive feedback from our connections here and in Washington.

What you can do is tell your friends about the issue, visit us and call Senator Feinstein's office (310 914-7300). Thank her for her support so far but urge her to CHAMPION the DREAM Act and push it from the judiciary committee to the Senate for a vote. Students feel confident that there is enough support that if it goes to a vote, it will pass. Now, all we need is to make sure it moves out of the Judiciary committee within the next few weeks because

the DREAM cannot wait any longer. Each year, 28,000 undocumented students graduate from high school in California alone. It is time that their DREAMS be realized.

If you have any questions-or like to sign up to volunteer please contact Ernesto Zumaya at (323) 594-7107/ [bruinzumaya86@gmail.com](mailto:bruinzumaya86@gmail.com).