

Case 6

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, known as the DREAM Act, was introduced in the US Senate in 2001. Its sponsors' intent was to provide a path to permanent residency for persons brought to the US as children by their illegal immigrant parents. The legislation would offer conditional permanent residency to "illegal aliens" who entered the country before the age of 16 and graduated from high school here, lived in the country continuously for at least five years before the bill's passage, and have good moral character. Those deemed eligible for this six year conditional permanent residency then have two options for earning a three year permanent residency. One of these is to complete successfully at least two years of college at a four year institution. Three years after achieving permanent residency, they would be eligible to apply for full US citizenship.

The bill has been debated many times since 2001, often as part of other legislation. But advocates have never garnered the necessary votes in Congress to pass it. In late 2010, a version of the DREAM Act passed the US House, but died in the Senate for want of votes to end a filibuster. Still, proponents seem determined to find consensus on a law to prevent deportation of people who were brought to the US as children by parents who came and stayed here illegally.

Not surprisingly, the major criticism of the DREAM Act comes from those who oppose immigration amnesty and charge that passage of the bill would encourage illegal immigration. They also claim that the government would be rewarding parental law-breaking. Further, critics claim that the education provision would be a burden for taxpayers who help pay for higher education. They also worry that US born students will be denied spots in universities and access to financial aid that goes to those eligible under the DREAM Act.

Proponents of the DREAM Act point to the fact that children who live in the US through no fault of their own, and who have grown up and done well here, should not be denied an opportunity to achieve citizenship. Advocates also argue that the education feature will encourage young people to reach their full potential, contribute to their communities, become taxpaying citizens, and thus increase the productivity and global stature of the US.