

## 'NO PAPERS' BUT ENDLESS COURAGE

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### **Body**

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THE APPEARANCE of Sonia Güinansaca, a 21-year-old New York resident, before a Washington criminal court judge this morning could decide the shape of the rest of her life and the lives of countless other talented young people.

Güinansaca is no criminal, mind you. She is an above-average student in her junior year at Hunter College with a social conscience and an impassioned desire to give back to the country she loves. She has never ran afoul of the law but she has a problem that has made her serious and thoughtful beyond her years.

"I have no papers," said the Ecuadoran-born Güinansaca, who has lived in Harlem since she was 5 years old. "And I am a DREAM Act activist and this year we made a conscious decision that enough is enough, that we would not be afraid any more."

Although the Obama administration appears to be holding off on deporting young people who would come under the proposed bill languishing in Congress, there is no guarantee, no stated policy. Deportation still lurks as a dark menace for these young undocumented Americans.

The DREAM Act would allow immigrant youth brought to the U.S. as children, graduated from high school here and completed two years of college or military service, a path to citizenship.

At the same time Güinansaca appears in court stemming from an act of civil disobedience another group of immigrant students, supporters and community members will end four days of protests with a demonstration at the Manhattan offices of Sen. Chuck Schumer. They will demand that Schumer and Rep. Nydia Velázquez(D-Brooklyn/Manhattan) lead efforts for the immediate passage of the DREAM Act.

A few days ago, Schumer introduced a border enforcement-only bill, that successfully passed with GOP support. The legislation entails \$600 million more for border security and further criminalization of immigrants, but does nothing to resolve the crisis. DREAM Act students were outraged.

"The DREAM Act is a bill that has bipartisan support and has the potential to be passed as a stand-alone measure, yet Sen. Schumer has not taken any action," the students wrote on the New York State Youth Leadership Council website.

Güinansaca says she is concerned about her court date - but unafraid.

"I have no one in Ecuador, my grandparents passed away," Güinansaca said. "

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As a member of council, Guinansaca lived up to on the group's motto, "Don't just dream, act".

On July 20, Güinansaca and a group of 20 DREAM Act supporters - many of them undocumented - were arrested when they staged sit-ins at the Senate office buildings to call attention to the urgent need for the legislation. In an act of defiance - unimaginable even a few months ago - they freely revealed their full names and immigration status knowing it could mean deportation.

"We cannot live our lives in fear...The worst that can happen is that our dreams are not fulfilled," Güinansaca said.

Today's court hearing will be further indication of the administration's intention in regard to the undocumented students. Initiating deportation procedures against them would mean punishing these young people for something they are not responsible for since they were brought to the U.S. as children by their parents. It would be a travesty.

Depriving about 1.5 million young people of their dreams would also, absurdly enough, deprive the nation of their enormous potential, talent and drive.

"This is my home," Güinansaca said, "and I want to be able to give back to my country."

She and her fellow dreamers deserve that opportunity. [aruiz@nydailynews.com](mailto:aruiz@nydailynews.com)

## Graphic

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When DREAM Act supporters staged July 20 sit-in at the U.S. Senate office building in Washington, undocumented Sonia Güinansaca (inset) was there.

## Classification

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