

For young Maryland immigrants, a path out of the shadows

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Body

They call themselves "**shadows**" - **young Maryland** residents brought to this country as children by their parents.

They worked hard. They excelled in our public schools. They want to go to college so they can be more productive members of our workforce. They do not ask for a free ride. Yet they remain **shadows** because their parents came without immigration papers. [The Maryland Dream Act](#) would bring these **young** people into daylight.

If upheld in a referendum by **Maryland** voters on Nov. 6, the Dream Act would allow these undocumented **young** people to pay in-state tuition rates at **Maryland's** public universities - provided that they meet stringent requirements.

As an American citizen by choice, I will vote in favor of the Dream Act. It is fair, just and economically beneficial to our state.

I staked my claim on the American Dream five decades ago. A "LatAsian" (Latino-Asian) - I grew up in Latin America speaking Spanish at school and Chinese at home - I came to the United States alone, as a teenager. I worked my way through college and became a lawyer, educator and university president.

At that time, exclusionary quotas limited the number of **immigrants** from certain countries. Congress later repealed these and widened the doors to citizenship. I remember well those uncertain times, so I empathize with today's **young shadows**.

My journey - and those of countless other **immigrants** who came before and after me - would be remarkable in almost any country other than the United States. We are a nation of nations. Most Americans have a hyphenated identity. We owe a great deal of our national vitality and success to the enduring dreams and hard work of **immigrants**.

After a couple of generations here, Americans tend to forget how difficult it was for their ancestors to tame our rocky soil, cut rock from quarries or weave a new life from rags. **Immigrants** ate their share of dust. They added grit to the American character.

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A **Maryland** commission's report on the "[Impact of Immigrants in Maryland](#)" notes that 57 percent of our state's workforce expansion from 2000 to 2010 came from **immigrants**. Our economy could not have grown without them. The economic contributions of **immigrants** far outweigh the costs borne by local and state government. The state would be "foolhardy" to shortchange the education of **immigrant** children who will be part of **Maryland's** next generation workforce, this commission said.

We know that education is the great equalizer in our democracy. It is the passport to social and economic mobility. The U.S. Supreme Court advanced these values when it ruled that undocumented children are [entitled to a public-school education](#).

It costs, on average, about \$14,000 a year to educate each **Maryland** public school student. It is a waste of investment and talent to then slam the door on those with the ability and motivation - but limited money - to go to college. Emerging economic powers invest heavily in educating their workforce of tomorrow. Our country's future depends on preparing every student to learn and work in a competitive, globalized economy.

The Dream Act sets a high bar. Its beneficiaries must have spent at least three years in a **Maryland** high school and earned a diploma or the equivalent. Their parents must have filed at least three years of income tax returns. They must earn 60 credits in community college or an associate degree. They must meet full academic requirements and get admitted to a University System of **Maryland** institution. Only then are they eligible to pay in-state tuition at University System schools.

Moreover, these undocumented transfer students will count as non-residents, though they pay resident rates. They do not take the space of other qualified **Maryland** resident students.

President Obama's recent order [defers possible deportation](#) for some "**shadows**" brought here before age 16. This two-year oasis will give them a chance to complete their education under the **Maryland** Dream Act.

Whatever the failings of our nation's immigration system, these **young** people were brought here and grew up here. They are now trapped in a dilemma they did not create. They have been educated and encouraged by their public-school teachers. They have dared to dream of productive lives. In these circumstances, I believe compassion must temper stern justice.

I support the **Maryland** Dream Act because I remember my **immigrant** days. I also support it because I have learned what it means to be an American. When we close the doors of opportunity to specific groups, we betray our core national belief that everyone deserves a chance to rise on his or her merits.

The American Dream belongs to all of us or none of us.

The writer is president of the University of **Maryland**.

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