



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Quaker values in action

Commentary on the DREAM Act

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act opens an opportunity to foster dialogue among immigrant rights groups, so that the hopes and aspirations of undocumented youth and students are not limited to serving in the armed services alone.

Through our decades of youth and immigration rights work, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has historically supported equal access to educational opportunities for all. We have accompanied communities as they demand that the universal human right to education is protected. We have advocated for children, youth and adults, regardless of their immigration status in the United States, to have equal access to education in order to guarantee the social and economic viability of the individual, the community and society in general.

AFSC, like much of the nation, has been inspired by the willingness of undocumented students to ensure that the universal human right to education is guaranteed, even when it might threaten their ability to stay in this country. It is evident that the actions of these undocumented youth have helped to positively impact the national debate on immigration and education.

We continue to stand with migrant and refugee communities in calling for immigration policies that protect human rights, keep families together, demilitarize communities and respect the quality of life for residents of the U.S.-Mexico border region.

But Congress continues to stall on passing humane immigration policy. The Senate's inaction on the DREAM Act is another indicator of the great need for decisive leadership in Congress to address one of our nation's urgent human rights issues: immigration.

AFSC reiterates its grave concern with the inclusion of military service in the DREAM Act and the exclusion of community service and vocational paths as viable alternatives for undocumented youth.

As an organization with strong community relationships and decades of work in support of youth and immigrants' rights as well as a track record of bearing witness to the horrors of armed conflict across our planet, AFSC rejects the inclusion of military service in any legislation that addresses the ability of immigrant youth to receive equal educational access, academic resources and external opportunities.

Given the evidence of pervasive, targeted military recruiting among young people of color and the many subsequent negative effects on their lives and their communities, AFSC deplores the use of a de facto "poverty draft." The youth of low-income, marginalized communities targeted

by this recruiting often see no other options than the military, thus they succumb to the “poverty draft.”

Undocumented youth seeking legal permanent residency could be misled into believing they would only have to serve for two years, as is implied by the current form of the DREAM Act. In fact, the current enlistment agreements contain no such provision – instead the commitment is for *eight* years.

AFSC will continue to work with youth, peace and immigrant rights organizations in order to ensure that the dignity of communities and the choices of youth are protected. AFSC will continue to advocate for legislation that includes:

- 1) Provisions that provide both a robust civilian community service path and a solid vocational path to legalization.
- 2) Access for undocumented students to federal financial aid for college including loans and grants.
- 3) Provisions that assure the protection of legal status for youth, who for reasons of conscience object to war and are no longer able to serve in the armed forces.

We call on likeminded people everywhere to help ensure the dreams of migrant youth for higher education and legal status become a reality.

September 22, 2010