



October 10, 2017

Senator Charles Grassley, Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein,

On behalf of the 23 national unions in the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE), I strongly urge you to support the DREAM Act of 2017 (S. 1615) without amendment. Absent Congressional action, nearly 800,000 young people will lose their ability to live and work in the only land they know as home if the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is terminated. The bipartisan DREAM Act would ensure these contributing members of our communities, workplaces, and military can stay out of the shadows, continue to work, and have a pathway to citizenship.

U.S. citizens and DACA beneficiaries alike benefit from the DACA program, and we will all be better off with Congress providing a permanent resolution of the Dreamers' immigration status through passage of the DREAM Act. DACA beneficiaries are on par with U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents in terms of their individual bargaining power as employees. They can walk away from a bad job and exercise their workplace rights without fear that unscrupulous employers may use their immigration status to threaten or retaliate against them.

All professionals do better because DACA beneficiaries can push for higher pay, join together in union to improve their workplaces, and blow the whistle on workplace crimes without fear that employers will use their immigration status as a retaliatory weapon. Additionally, all professionals will be worse off if DACA beneficiaries lose their ability to live and work out of the shadows in the United States.

The stories of Jose Galvan, Karen Reyes, Selene Meza, and Esther Lee demonstrate the positive impact DACA beneficiaries have had on our economy, our workplaces, and our communities.

Jose Galvan, aspiring Stage Directors and Choreographers Society member

Jose Galvan is a theater professional, aspiring member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), and a DACA beneficiary. He came to the United States from

Mexico as a two year old with his mother and brother. They decided to come to the United States to reunite with Jose's father, who had been living, working, and paying taxes in California.

Jose was the first in his family to graduate high school, and earned a full, merit-based scholarship to attend the University of San Diego (USD). At USD, Jose discovered his passion for theater.

"I fell in love, because I learned as an artist I had a voice," said Jose of his introduction to theater. "I could use art to start a dialogue, make people feel something, question something, make a difference."

Jose went on to graduate with a bachelor's degree in theatre arts and performance studies with an emphasis in directing. While a senior at the University of San Diego, Jose became the first artistic and literary intern for the Old Globe in San Diego, a theater modeled after Shakespeare's Old Globe in London. Following graduation, Jose was offered a job in the Arts Engagement Department at the Old Globe.

Jose now has a career in theater. Most recently, he directed a show for children of military families that aimed to help them deal with the unique challenges they face with loved ones in the armed forces. The show toured military bases, armories, and armed services' YMCAs. Jose is now working towards graduate school and getting his master's degree in directing.

Jose spent essentially his whole life in the United States—it is all he knows. The impending loss of DACA means that Jose could lose his ability to work legally, his access to health insurance, his opportunity to pursue a MFA, and his home. The end of DACA also means the United States could lose someone who has already made important contributions to the country and is on a path to making many more.

Karen Reyes, American Federation of Teachers member

Karen Reyes is a DACAmented teacher and a member of Education Austin, part of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Karen came to the United States from Mexico at the age of two. She grew up the United States and always thought of herself as a typical American kid—since that's who she was. However, once she realized she was undocumented, she began to hold back, frozen by fear.

"I held back from friendships, I held back from activities, I held back from applying to the universities that I really wanted to attend, because would they want me even with my status," said Karen.

Fortunately, Karen was able to attend college and pursue her dream of working in education. She earned a private scholarship to attend the Deaf Education and Hearing Science program at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

In 2012, Karen was able to become a DACA beneficiary and teach children who are deaf

and hard of hearing. Karen is helping these students and their families communicate and achieve their own dreams.

“DACA made me find my voice and made me be able to live without fear. DACA made me visible, it has empowered me and made it possible for me to come out of the shadows and fight for myself and for the other 800,000-plus Dreamers,” said Karen. “We must defend DACA because, after living here for 26 years, I am here to stay.”

Selene Meza, Office and Professional Employees International Union member

Selene Meza is a DACA beneficiary serving on the front lines of the opioid epidemic as a chemical dependency professional in Bellingham, Washington. Selene arrived in the United States with her family when she was 13. As a young teenage she knew she did not have documents, but at that time she did not know what that meant.

In high school, Selene realized that she was at a disadvantage because she was undocumented. She could not work summer jobs like her friends, and she didn't think she could go to college. Fortunately, Selene was able to attend community college and then transfer to a four year school to earn her bachelor's in psychology. Selene was the first in her family to graduate from college.

While finishing college, Selene initially qualified for DACA. The work authorization Selene received through DACA meant that she could put her degree to use. Selene went to work at a community behavioral health clinic, where she still works today as an addiction treatment counselor. Selene helps people fighting addictions to heroin and works with patients' families. She is a member of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 8.

As a DACA beneficiary, Selene has been able to contribute to her household, which includes her husband and two young children. The end of DACA without a legislative solution will not only pull an important resource away from the fight against the disease of addiction, but it will also make it difficult for Selene to provide for her family.

Esther Lee, Writers Guild of America, East member

Esther Lee is a *ThinkProgress* reporter, member of Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE), and has been a beneficiary of the DACA program since 2012. When Esther was two years old, she escaped domestic violence with her mother by coming to the United States from Taiwan. Esther spent her childhood in California.

After she graduated from high school, Esther was able to attend New York University. She paid for her education with money earned working, along with financial assistance from family.

Esther earned her DACA approval in 2012. Her work authorization from DACA meant that she could pursue her journalism career.

“Coming out of the shadows meant that I was able to get a job that didn’t leave me at the whim of my employers,” Esther notes.

For Esther, the stability provided by DACA has proved instrumental in getting her where she is today as a reporter with *ThinkProgress*.

With DACA’s end on the horizon, the DREAM Act is needed now more than ever. I strongly urge you to support the DREAM Act of 2017 without amendment to allow young professionals like Jose, Karen, Selene, and Esther to continue to contribute to the American economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul E. Almeida".

Paul E. Almeida
President