

August 30, 2021

Dr. James Dlugos, St. Joseph's College of Maine - President

The Honorable Susan Collins
U.S. Senate
413 Dirksen Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus King
U.S. Senate
133 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Delivered via email

Re: Request from Maine Higher Education Institutions to Co-sponsor and Support the Dream Act of 2021, or to Include Dreamer Relief in the Budget Reconciliation Package

Dear Senators Collins and King:

On July 16, 2021, Judge Hanan of the Federal District Court in Texas ruled against the legality of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. While temporarily preventing his ruling from stripping current DACA holders of that status, Judge Hanan blocked federal immigration officials from adjudicating pending initial applications by over 60,000 so-called Dreamers, or from accepting any new initial applications. The federal court's decision puts current DACA holders in limbo and thwarts the ability of upwards of 1.7 million Dreamers¹ to have full futures in the U.S., including access to higher education and careers matching their highest potential.

We, the undersigned Maine institutions, know that you both are ardent supporters of DACA holders and Dreamers, and that you worked tirelessly to craft a bipartisan path to permanent residency for them after the prior administration announced the DACA program's rescission in late 2017. We look to you now to provide similar leadership to persuade your Senate colleagues to act urgently to pass the Durbin-Graham bipartisan Dream Act of 2021 (S.264), or to ensure that the budget reconciliation bill passes with language in it providing a roadmap to citizenship for them. These individuals—Americans in every sense but on paper—seek to pursue their studies, work in our communities, serve in the military, and contribute to our state and nation. The increasing uncertainty over the DACA program following Judge Hanan's ruling underscores the need for the Senate to act, as only Congress can provide the certainty that these members of our community deserve. The whole nation will benefit through legalizing these young adults who are already part of us.

As higher education leaders, we see the immense contributions that our immigrant and international students, scholars, staff, and faculty make on a daily basis to our campuses and communities. Protection for Dreamers during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is particularly critical, as 202,500 DACA recipients have been serving as essential workers keeping our country fed, safe, clean, and healthy on the front lines of a global health crisis.² The Dream Act of 2021 represents one of the most viable pieces of bipartisan immigration legislation, and the Senate should move forward on passing a clean version of the Dream Act without amendments. Finally, we encourage the Senate to maintain the current eligibility criteria for the bill and not narrow eligibility to a smaller number of Dreamers or to only current DACA holders, which would only partially solve this issue and leave behind the remaining Dreamer population, wasting their potential, and abdicating the issue to future Congresses.

¹ Jessica Bolter, et al., Back on the Table: U.S. Legalization and the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate, Migr. Pol'y Inst. 9 (2021), available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/us-legalization-unauthorized-immigrant-groups>. Dreamers consist of a variety of domestic students, including students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and other undocumented immigrant students who arrived in the United States at a young age.

² Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, *A Demographic Profile of DACA Recipients on the Frontlines of the Coronavirus Response*, Ctr. for Am. Progress (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2020/04/06/482708/demographic-profile-daca-recipients-frontlines-coronavirus-response/>.

An estimated 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high school every year³. These are individuals who, if legalized, could become our next generation of active community members, volunteers, civic leaders, and workers at every level, from skilled trades to teachers, scientists, engineers, healthcare professionals, and entrepreneurs.

While Maine has relatively few current DACA holders, conservatively, **over 1500 immigrant youth would become eligible for permanent residency through the Dream Act**⁴ who are dependents on their parent(s)' asylum applications, and could begin building real futures here in Maine, even while their parents remain mired in asylum processing backlogs.

Nationally there are approximately 427,000 undocumented students enrolled in higher education institutions, including 181,000 DACA-eligible individuals.⁵ These students, including here in Maine, are working diligently to advance themselves, notwithstanding their uncertainty regarding whether they will be able to complete their education, much less remain and make a life in the United States.

There is strong, bipartisan support for Dreamers and for Congress to establish a roadmap to citizenship. In a February 2021 Quinnipiac poll, 83 percent of all Americans (and 66 percent of Republicans) favored "allowing undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children to remain in the United States and eventually apply for citizenship."⁶ In fact, according to PRRI polling, support for allowing Dreamers to gain legal resident status has steadily increased over the years.⁷

We appreciate your many efforts thus far to support higher education on behalf of our state and its immigrant and international students. We sincerely hope you will continue to support those who contribute so much to our campuses, communities, and economy with renewed urgency given the recent federal court decision on DACA.

We would welcome the opportunity to tell you more about why we support this and other needed reforms to modernize our immigration system so that our immigrant and international students can live freely and fully contribute to our communities and economy in Maine. We are eager to work with you on these important issues. For any questions or to follow up from this letter, please contact Daniel Walker of Maine Independent Colleges Association at dwalker@preti.com or 207-623-5300.

Sincerely,



³ Jie Zong & Jeanne Batalova, How Many Unauthorized Immigrants Graduate from U.S. High Schools Annually?, Migr. Pol'y Inst. (2019), available at <https://www.presidentsalliance.org/migration-policy-institute-fact-sheet-on-number-of-dreamers-graduating-from-high-school/>.

⁴ Estimate derived from asylum application data from the Departments of Justice and of Homeland Security, and Maine Department of Education data.

⁵ Pres.' All. on Higher Educ. & Immigr. & New Am. Econ., Undocumented Students in Higher Education: How Many Students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They? (2021), available at <https://www.presidentsalliance.org/report-undocumented-students-in-higher-education-how-many-students-are-in-u-s-colleges-and-universities-and-who-are-they/>.

⁶ Quinnipiac Univ. Poll, Press Release, 61% Optimistic About Next Four Years With Biden in Office, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; 68% of Americans Support the \$1.9 Trillion Stimulus Relief Bill (Feb. 3, 2021), https://poll.qu.edu/images/polling/us/us02032021_uszn68.pdf. See poll question no. 51.

⁷ Robert P. Jones, et al., Pub. Religion Rsch. Inst., Immigration After Trump: What Would Immigration Policy That Followed American Public Opinion Look Like? (2021), available at <https://www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PRRI-2021-Immigration-Post-Trump.pdf>.