



DEBATING THE DREAM ACT

November 5, 2003

Luis Herrera's parents brought him to the United States 10 years ago on a tourist visa that has now expired. He'd like to go to the University of Arizona but the 20-year-old community college student can't qualify for in-state tuition or financial aid because he's an illegal resident.

"I consider myself an American," Herrera told the Tucson Citizen. "This is my country; most of my life I've been living here."

However, if a proposed bill becomes a law, Herrera's situation could change.

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill that would allow some illegal immigrant students the chance to gain legal residency and become eligible for in-state college tuition.

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act or DREAM Act is controversial because opponents say that it rewards illegal behavior-- using the tax-payer money that supports public universities. Supporters argue it provides educational opportunities for children who did not choose to enter the U.S. illegally.

Senators Orrin Hatch (R – Utah) and Richard Durbin (D – Illinois) sponsored the DREAM Act. It now moves to the full Senate for a vote. President Bush has indicated that he would sign the legislation into law.

Under the legislation, illegal immigrants could apply for legal residency if they have lived in the U.S. for at least five years and entered the country before age 16, have completed two years of military service or two years of college within six years of high school graduation, and have a clean criminal record.

The bill's supporters say it provides educational opportunities to a vulnerable community. "They did not make the initial decision to enter the United States illegally," said sponsor Hatch. "We have a choice to either keep these talented young people underground or give them a chance to contribute to the United States."

But opponents of the bill say that the bill is being used as a political tool to appeal to immigrant voters. They also fear it would encourage more families to enter the country illegally. "This bill is a crass political calculation aimed at selling amnesty disguised as an educational initiative," said Dan Stein, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group that would like to see stricter immigration policies.

What do you think? Should the U.S. grant amnesty to illegal immigrants brought to this country as children and allow them to pay in-state tuition at public universities? Why or why not? Send your opinions to NewsHour Extra at extra@newshour.org