

National Coalition for Immigrant Women's Rights

Statement on the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (“DREAM”) Act

As policymakers and immigrant rights advocates continue to seek ways to fix the country's broken immigration system, the National Coalition for Immigrant Women's Rights (NCIWR) recognizes that the DREAM Act represents a partial solution for undocumented young adults to gain citizenship status. Under the DREAM Act, a young immigrant who was brought to the U.S. as an undocumented child can earn permanent legal status over a six-year period if s/he shows good moral character and completes two years of college or military service. NCIWR believes that the education option creates a promising incentive that can beneficially impact young immigrants and the future of our country. On the other hand, the Coalition believes the military option represents an underhanded policy that inappropriately ties the military's recruitment shortage with citizenship. This provision of the DREAM Act is a veiled attempt to exploit a vulnerable population, which NCIWR finds unacceptable.

We recognize that each year, an estimated 65,000 U.S.-raised immigrant youth stand to benefit from legislation that would provide a pathway to legal residency that does not depend on their parent's status.ⁱ All young people regardless of citizenship status should have access to low-cost, high quality institutions of higher learning, yet the reality of skyrocketing tuition rates means that the majority of youth in this country simply cannot afford to go to college. Accordingly, most undocumented young people who want immigration relief and have little or no income or financial support will be forced to take the military option in return for legal residency.

We also recognize that young immigrants have increasingly become the focus of well-funded military recruitment programs, which have a well-documented history of targeting low-income communities of color.ⁱⁱ After the draft ended in 1973, the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), which operates in high schools and GED programs across the country, developed recruitment campaigns targeting African-American teenagers for enlistment.ⁱⁱⁱ However, as educational achievement rates for black youth began to rise in the 1980s, military enlistment rates decreased among African-Americans, spurring DEP recruiters to look to immigrants—particularly Latino youth—as the military's new source of recruits.^{iv} Given this history, NCIWR believes the DREAM Act's military option will open the floodgates for similar discriminatory military policies that already seek out young people with very limited options.

Lastly, we believe the DREAM Act's guarantee of legal residency for “two years of military service” is a false promise. Two-year military contracts do not exist; all new enlistments with the U.S. Military are required to serve a total of eight years.^v Young immigrant women who join the military also face the occupational hazard of rape and sexual harassment. Unfortunately, an increasing number of reports reveal that women in the military routinely experience sexual harassment and assault at recruitment centers, basic training camps and even during deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan.^{vi} In addition, military women who have no legal status and no legal rights will find little redress or justice when they report sexual assault or rape during their tour of duty.

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For the reasons stated above, NCIWR cannot support the DREAM Act. Instead, we will continue to promote and defend equality for all immigrants and ensure that they are able to live free from discrimination, oppression and violence in all forms.

NCIWR advocates for fair, comprehensive and non-discriminatory approaches to immigration reform and policies that promote equality, reproductive justice, and economic justice for immigrant women.

ⁱ National Immigration Law Center, "DREAM Act: Basic Information," Feb. 2007, available at http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/DREAM/dream_basic_info_0406.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Mennonite Central Committee, "Military Recruitment, Communities of Color and Immigrants," available at <http://mcc.org/us/co/stories/militaryrecruitment.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Deborah Davis, "Illegal Immigrants: Uncle Sam Wants You," *In These Times*, July 25, 2007.

^{iv} *Id.*

^v See Military Enlistment/Reenlistment Document, DD Form 4/1 at Paragraph 10a, available at <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/joiningthemilitary/l/blcontract.htm>.

^{vi} Alternet Website, "For Female Soldiers, Sexual Assault Remains a Danger," Celina R. De Leon, January 5, 2007 available at <http://www.alternet.org/story/46294/>