

STATEMENT OF

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TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION,
REFUGEES AND BORDER SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE

RE: S. 952, DEVELOPMENT, RELIEF, AND EDUCATION
FOR ALIEN MINORS (DREAM) ACT OF 2011

Submitted on behalf of:

ACT, Inc.
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of University Professors
American Council on Education
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Association of American Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Research Libraries
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Opportunity in Education
Council of Graduate Schools
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
National Collegiate Athletic Association

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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cornyn, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

On behalf of the American Council on Education and the undersigned higher education associations representing the nation's two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities and the nearly 20 million students they serve, I write in strong support of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2011 ("DREAM Act") and urge that it be enacted this year.

Increased access to higher education is a top priority for our associations and the institutions we represent. As the name of the legislation recognizes, higher education is essential to achieving the "American dream" that immigrants to this country have sought since the founding of the nation. The DREAM Act is designed to focus on the special case of undocumented young people who came to this country because of the actions of their parents. They consider themselves to be American, just like their classmates, and in most ways they are. For many of these students, the U.S. is the only country they have known.

The bill will remove barriers to higher education for thousands of these students who have grown up in this country, attended our schools, worked hard and have the desire and capacity to make vital contributions to the nation's economic strength and security. We need them to be able to contribute to our economy and society to the full extent of their abilities. For this reason, we have supported the DREAM Act since it was originally introduced in 2001.

The DREAM Act would do two things to make the future brighter for these students. First, the bill would repeal Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 ("IIRIRA") which currently penalizes states for providing in-state tuition to undocumented students. By repealing Section 505, the DREAM Act does not force particular action by states but would simply return to the states the option to decide on their own whether to extend in-state tuition to undocumented students.

Second, the DREAM Act would establish a six-year conditional permanent residency status for students who were brought to this country by age 15 or younger, have been here at least five years as of the enactment date, have graduated from a U.S. high school or obtained a GED test credential and pass a background check. Students with conditional permanent resident status would not be eligible for federal financial aid, including Pell Grants, but would be eligible for Federal Work-Study funding and student loans. DREAM-eligible individuals

may qualify for permanent residency after six years by completing at least two years of higher education or two years of military service

We recognize that the debate over immigration is complex and evokes strong emotion. The DREAM Act, however, is an important tool for achieving our national goal of returning the United States to world leadership in higher education attainment. It has been estimated that 65,000 DREAM-eligible students graduate from American high schools each year. These students, many of whom are in this country through decisions beyond their control, often have to overcome enormous barriers to graduate from high school, have shown themselves to be exceptional members of our communities and exhibit exemplary academic achievement. We cannot afford to stymie their aspirations to continue their education and contribute to our economy and society. By providing them with a path to education and legal immigration status, our entire country will benefit as these individuals will contribute to our efforts to be more competitive in the global economy and will enhance our national security by contributing to our military's readiness. It is truly in our best interest to ensure they have the opportunity to achieve their dreams and become part of the well-educated and competitive work force that our country needs today.

We strongly support the DREAM Act and look forward to working with you to ensure swift passage of this important legislation.