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Undocumented Youth Reach Final Destination!

150-mile walk shows determination and urgency to get New York Dream Act in 2012!

Albany, NY. On April 17th, 2012, after walking 150 miles of many steps, many strides, and many dreams, 15 undocumented youth and supporters from the New York State Youth Leadership Council (NYSYLC) arrived in Albany. This long journey began on April 9th in an effort to stress the urgency of and emphasize the need for Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature to support the New York Dream Act (S4179/A6829). This bill, which was introduced in March of 2011 by Senator Bill Perkins and Assemblyman Guillermo Linares, would provide access to state-funded financial aid (TAP) and scholarships to qualifying undocumented youth.

These 15 courageous and tenacious undocumented youth and supporters walked miles and miles sharing their stories and struggles with community members and legislators along the way. The walk was an urgent call to elected officials to pass the New York Dream Act this year. The New York Dream Act is economically beneficial and fiscally responsible. As the walker Yohan Garcia states, "the New York Dream Act bill will benefit many undocumented youth like me, who dream of becoming professionals. Among us are future lawyers, doctors, nurses, elected officials, engineers, and business leaders." The New York Dream Act will enhance the sense of community in places these undocumented youth call home, and it encourages them to continue contributing to the state economy. Most importantly, it will help New York re-enforce a sense of leadership as a beacon for immigrant rights in a time when the undocumented are facing draconian, anti-immigrant measures in many other states that violate their civil rights.

"The Governor's full and assertive support of the DREAM act is needed at this time," said Senator Bill Perkins, "Anything less may be perceived as him merely feigning support in the interest of political coverage while avoiding the political controversy of him not truly supporting it. The fact is, however, that while the political dance ensues, tens of thousands of undocumented youth continue to suffer and await uncertain futures."

"We can't go another year without allowing these undocumented students rightful access to State Financial Aid," said Assemblyman Linares, "The spirit shown by these young people walking to Albany sends a strong message. We must secure our State's educational future by passing the New York DREAM Act."

Senator Rivera stated, "While I believe Congress needs to take steps to fixing our broken immigration system and pass the federal DREAM Act, we as New Yorkers have to do everything in our power to equal the playing field for these talented students when it comes to ensuring they have access to an affordable education. In a state that has been a leader on issues of civil rights and immigrants' rights, we must act to make a difference in the lives of students who deserve our state's help in order achieve their dreams."

"The federal government may spend decades deadlocked and unable to fix our broken immigration system, but every young person who grows up in New York deserves a fair chance," said Senator Krueger, "We are all punished when young people in our state are not allowed to continue their education and thrive."

"All New Yorkers deserve access to affordable higher education, regardless of where they come from or immigration status," said Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, who represents one of the most diverse legislative districts in the country and serves as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Higher Education. "We charge in-state tuition for undocumented people and then deny them a method to pay for it. We need a DREAM Act, not a nightmare."

"We have repeatedly told our youth that attaining a degree from a higher education institution will provide them an opportunity to succeed and prosper. Educating our youth and young adults should be a main priority for communities across the state, regardless of residency status," stated Senator Huntley, "The New York Dream Act seeks to fulfill that goal and promise and to ensure that the 'land of opportunity' applies to everyone, not just a select few."

Senator Duane said, "Immigrant communities have been central to our State's economic, political, and cultural life for centuries. The Dream Act would expand educational opportunities to immigrant young people and demonstrate New York's ongoing commitment to progressive immigration policy. We must pass the Dream Act this session in order to open the doors of higher education to all New Yorkers."

"Every New York resident deserves access to a higher education. The cornerstone ideal of our nation is that everyone should have the opportunity to better themselves through determination and hard work," said Senator Avella. "For generations New York has served as a beacon for those seeking a better life and our state has benefited as a result. We must not shirk our responsibilities to future Americans, and so I urge the immediate passage of the DREAM Act."

"New York has always been and must remain a gateway to opportunity for all who seek it. The DREAM Act will allow New York to take the lead in a place where the federal government so far hasn't," said Senator Daniel Squadron. "It's time to ensure that every young person who wants to work hard and better our society has the chance to do so."

Senator Adriano Espaillat (D – Manhattan/Bronx) said " We are proud to join young people fighting for the dream to go to college. While undocumented students work hard through school, once they graduate high school, their dreams hit a ceiling, and they are unable to go forward and pursue their aspirations. This is both unjust and counterproductive. Together, we must pass the DREAM Act and build a stronger, more prosperous New York for all."

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