

Jonathan Jimenez
Make the Road New York, Member
New York State DREAM Act, Higher Education Hearing
February 12, 2013
Albany, NY

Hello,

My name is Jonathan Jimenez, I am a member of Make the Road New York, a pro-immigrant organization that works to empower and organize the Latino community. I am an undocumented student at Queensborough Community College. My undocumented status makes me ineligible to apply for financial aid to attend college; making college tuitions essentially unaffordable. I share this struggle with many other undocumented students who want to pursue higher education, but face extreme difficulty being able to pay tuition. My mother and father both work hard to be able to send me to college. It has been very difficult for me to see my father work double shifts, 24 hours in order to be able to get enough money to pay for our food, our bills, and my tuition. Having two hard working parents does not make tuition more affordable. Currently, I am planning on getting a job in order to contribute to my tuition--because at the end of the day it is for me and it is something I want. I aspire to be a successful person and be great in my own way.

For the past couple of years other Dreamers have endured the struggle of pursuing higher education and made it. An example of a Dreamer that has accomplished this is, Cristina Jimenez. Cristina is currently the managing director of United We Dream. While in college, Cristina worked at a supermarket to help her parents pay for her college tuition. Not only is Cristina the first in her family to graduate from college, but while in college she earned the highest grades possible.

Cristina is a role model for all Dreamers--she is an excellent example of what an undocumented person can do with a degree if given the opportunity to attend a higher education institution. Cristina is my older sister. In addition to working and pursuing her degree, she took care of me. My sister's accomplishments have deeply shaped my own goals; I want to be the second person in my family to graduate from college and have a successful career.

However, it is important to emphasize that not all Dreamers have the sort of support system that my sister and I do. We are fortunate to have supportive parents that work to help us pursue higher education. Too many Dreamers are felt feeling that obtaining a college degree is not in their future because of the high costs. Without financial aid to pay for our education our goals as Dreamers may never be accomplished. That is why I believe that we as college students and as Dreamers should be able to apply for financial aid in order to become the next generation of lawyers, doctors, and businessmen and women.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Jimenez

Katherine Tabares

Higher Education Hearing

Make the Road NY

February 10, 2013

TESTIMONY

My name is Katherine Tabares, I am 17 years old and I came from Colombia in 2010. My parents and I migrated to the United States looking to achieve the American Dream, having a better economic status and obtaining a higher education. However, accomplishing this goal has become very difficult because my father has gone back to Colombia. My mother and I are alone in this country and we are both undocumented. Through the struggle, I was able to graduate from an International High School, which is a network of schools that accept students that have been in the country for less than 4 years. Now, I am currently attending LaGuardia Community College and I have been very lucky to be part of the College Now program. A program offered by High schools in the New York City area in which I have been taking advantage of the free college classes offered at the partnered college campuses. However, my first year as an undergraduate student is about to end and the program is not going to be offered to me anymore. This represents a big obstacle in my life.

Even though I was in the top ten of my graduating class with a 3.9 GPA, I was not able to obtain a scholarship that will finance my college career. In the fall of 2013, I will be transferring to Hunter College. I want to continue my path as a Political Science major, in hopes of one day becoming a lawyer to help out my community. However, due to my immigration status, there is no funding offered by the state government for me to continue my higher education journey. It is why the Tuition Assistance Program must also be offered to undocumented students through the NYS Dream Act bill. This bill will benefit both the student and the state. Having a financial source from the state for me, will mean the ability to continue my education but most importantly see my mother more often. Right now I can only see my mother three to four times a month because she is working as a home health-aid overnight from Monday through Sunday. She does this in order to provide money for the house and save money for me to attend college. In addition, it will mean that I would not have two jobs, one over the week and one over the weekend while I attend college.

On June 15th of 2012 president Obama made a historic announcement of a bill that will allow undocumented students to have a job permit and relieve their fear of deportation. With this bill, undocumented New Yorkers will be able to work in the fields they have been studying for but they won't receive financial support. It is unacceptable that the state will deny the equal right of education to undocumented students that want to succeed in this country like myself. It is also unacceptable that families and single mothers like mine have to work day and night in order to save money to accomplish my dreams. Therefore, the NYS Dream Act must become a reality because it will provide financial benefits for both the state and undocumented students. If you invest money in education, you will be investing money in the future of New York State.

Pass the NYS Dream Act NOW!

Natalia Aristizabal
Make the Road NY
Higher Education Hearing
Albany NY 2/12/2013

Hello everyone my name is Natalia Aristizabal and I'm here representing Make the Road NY, a pro-immigrant organization with more than 12,000 members in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and Long Island. I'm here today to talk to you about an issue that affects a specific population in New York State, including many of our members. This issue is pertains to the lack of availability of financial resources for undocumented youth to be able to attend college.

I have been working with undocumented youth for about 8 years and throughout that time I've had to have very difficult conversations with young people about their futures. I have to tell them that even though they have done nothing wrong, because they are undocumented, the process for obtaining their dreams will be a slow and challenging one. Although some undocumented students are eligible for in-state tuition at CUNY and SUNY schools--if they meet the residency requirements, even paying that tuition can be difficult – especially now that the cost is going up. And in the meantime there is no help available to them to pay that tuition, despite the fact that all other students have access to millions of dollars in state aid and scholarships, as well as private scholarships. The few scholarships that are available to undocumented youth only cover a very small percentage of the population.

So every day, when they come into my office, I help them create payment plans and life plans so they can work and go to school. Many times, regardless of their grades, undocumented youth have to choose a 2 year college because it is cheaper. Even then they usually can take just one or two classes at a time, because without help that is all they can afford. This is not even counting the tremendous amount of young people who decide not to go to college because they don't want to go through all of this, choosing instead to just get a job and hope to somehow climb the ladder. Or work construction jobs from a very young age because they feel that is the only opportunity they'll ever have to earn a living – even though this means giving up on their dreams of getting an education.

In the state of New York the amount of students of color attending college is extraordinarily small when compared to the number of people of color and youth who are residents of New York. The highest percentages of young people who drop out of high school are English language learners, Latinos and African Americans. There is a clear, direct connection here. The system has failed by not providing the most vulnerable population of students the financial help they need to finish higher education and contribute back to their communities.

You all have the power to make these dreams come closer to reality by passing the New York State DREAM Act. This bill would allow some of the most talented youth in our state that have more than a 80% school average to get money from Tuition Assistance Program, giving them the same opportunity to learn and give back to this great state as all of their classmates. It also opens a Fund that would fundraise private money to provide scholarships to the children of immigrants. New York State DREAM Act is a common sense bill that would allow

undocumented students the possibility of obtaining state aid, if they qualify – putting them on equal terms with all other students in the state.

So I ask you to remember what it was like to be a high school senior who was about to go to college. Remember what that process was like. Now imagine that you have no financial help. This process can be life-changing and we want to promote healthy, educated New Yorkers. It is in your hands to provide these amazing young people with the tools they need to make that dream a reality. We ask you to please do everything you can to do that. Please support the New York State DREAM Act now – and you will change these young people's futures and give them the educational opportunities that they deserve.

Thank you.