

Speaking Up

Advocacy Toolkit for Immigrant Students to Support Dream Legislation¹



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¹ For questions about this toolkit, please contact jose@masdac.com.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This toolkit was prepared in light of the recent reintroduction of several pieces of state and federal legislation affecting undocumented youth, including the [Dream Act of 2021](#). It is a resource for DREAMers and other immigrant youth to lobby their state and federal representatives on their own behalf. This toolkit contains a guide for contacting representatives, sample scripts, an FAQ section, as well as additional resources.

Storytelling and advocacy

Storytelling is a key part of exercising your power in advocacy. State and federal legislators put more weight on feedback from someone who is (1) from their district/state and (2) directly impacted by an issue. Telling your story:

- Puts you in the driver's seat to advocate on your own behalf
- Lends credibility to the impact of a piece of legislation
- Gives vital context to the impact to your life and future and that of your community
- Can break through rhetoric to put a human face to the problem
- Gives urgency for a solution
- Can engage your listener and move them to action

II. WHERE TO START: FINDING YOUR STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATORS

You can contact your representatives in a variety of ways, including email, phone, and in-person visits. Member offices welcome and expect outreach from constituents—regardless of whether constituents are U.S. citizens—and have staff specifically to receive emails, phone calls, and correspondence on issues.

- Find out who your state and federal representatives are [here](#).
- Find their website and contact information [here](#), or
- Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 where a switchboard operator will forward your call directly to the office you request.

Most member websites will have a contact form or a general phone number available to contact the office, usually on the “Contact” page. To get more specific contact information for a staffer who handles immigration issues, you can:

- Call the general office number and ask for the staffer who handles immigration (make sure to write down how to spell their name and email)
- Email Ellen Findley at ellen@masadc.com (bcc: jose@masadc.com and gaby.pacheco@thedream.us) with the subject line “Dream Act of 2021 – Request for congressional staffer information for [your legislators name]” and ask for the contact information for immigration staffer in the office you are trying to reach.

III. GATHERING THE ADVOCATES IN YOUR LIFE

There is strength in numbers. Communicating as a group of like-minded individuals or in conjunction with an organization near you can lend weight to your message, whether in the form of individual letters/phone calls, petitions, or banding together to schedule a meeting.

There is strength in variety. Any issue that affects you also affects the people who know and care about you. Your friends, family, co-workers, faith leaders, teachers, professors, etc. are all potential advocates on your behalf. Offices value hearing from a variety of constituents impacted

by a particular issue. Start with those you trust and tap them to advocate with you. Advocates in your life could support you through activities like:

- Hosting or helping you host a letter writing or phone party using the phone and email/letter guides below
- Extending your reach by speaking on the issue to communities or groups they lead or that you are not a part of, as well as fellow leaders or professionals (a faith leader to a congregation, a co-worker to their team, a professor to your school, etc.)
- Volunteering or lending skills/expertise to organizations that support you or advocate for your issue

IV. COMMUNICATING FOR HIGH IMPACT

No matter your method of communication (email, phone, or in-person), the basic steps of communicating a clear, concise message remain the same:

1. Introduce yourself
2. State where you are from or currently a resident (connect to their district or state)
3. State what you are concerned about
4. Ask for what you want from your member (be specific)
5. State why this is important to you personally
6. Repeat your ask
7. Thank them for their time

Different methods of communication will allow for more or less time and specificity.

For a phone call

Best for short and to the point communication. When you call, a legislative assistant will answer the phone. They will take your name and ask if you would like a response. If you say “yes,” they will take down your information and add you to a response database, and then you can relay your message. An example:

"Hello, my name is Javier Cho. I'm a constituent in Raleigh, North Carolina zip code 27609. [response question] I am calling in support of the Dream Act of 2021, and I urge the senator to please vote yes on the bill. If this bill passes, I will be able to apply for a legal immigration status and finally get my nursing license. Again, I ask the senator to please vote yes on the Dream Act. Thank you for your time!"

For an email/letter

Good for longer-form communication. Address the letter directly to your member, and feel free to pull in statistics (see the final section for resources) and tell your longer story. A sample template:

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Member last name]:

My name is [name], and I write to you as a constituent of [city], [state]. I urge you to [Specific ask. For example: “cosponsor the Dream Act of 2021 (S.264)” or “vote no on restricting driver’s licenses for undocumented residents”].

I have lived in [state] since I was [number] years old, and I [currently attend/attended/want to attend] [university name] for a degree in [major]. But as [an undocumented immigrant, a DACA recipient, etc.], I am unable to [afford in-state tuition, get a job in my field, live without fear of deportation, etc.]. [Describe your story in a paragraph. How are you involved in your community? What difficulties do you face due to the issue at hand? What do you hope for the future, and how does this issue affect that future? What would change about your life if the legislation in question passed?]

As a proud resident of [state/city], I am asking for the same opportunity to build a life and contribute to my community as any other [state resident]. I urge you to [repeat ask from first paragraph]. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*[your name]
[city, state]*

For an in-person meeting

Takes a bit more planning, but you may have an opportunity to speak directly with your member or the person in their office in charge of your issue. If you have connections to a local organization concerned with your issue, they may be able to help you set up a meeting. If you are planning yourself, here are some steps you can take:

- Find the closest local office for your member through [their website](#) (usually under “Contact” or “Locations”).
- Find out when your member will be back in your district by checking when the legislature is *not* in session. While not essential, the best time to set a meeting is when your member is back home in the district. Find your state legislative calendar [here](#), and the federal calendar [here](#).
- Request a meeting through your member’s website (usually through a “Request a meeting” form or a provided email). If sending an email, be sure to include:
 - Your name and address (to show that you are a constituent)
 - The issues you wish to discuss
 - The local office you wish to visit
 - The dates that you can meet (include several dates or a wide time frame so that there is flexibility to schedule the meeting)

Using an organization’s **letterhead** (a branded template, usually with their logo) can lend credibility to your request, so if you are working with an organization you should write your email using their letterhead if possible.

A sample email template:

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Member last name]:

My name is [name], and I write to you as a constituent of [city], [state] to request a meeting with you and your aides to discuss [issue]. I will be available to meet with you at your [location] office on [dates you are available] and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about these

issues. I can be reached at the phone numbers listed below and will look forward to hearing from you regarding a time we can meet. Thank you for your consideration.

*Respectfully,
[your name]
[your address]
[your phone number]*

- Using the local office number, follow up with a phone call 2-3 business days after your initial request if no response. Ask for the person in charge of scheduling your member's appointments. A sample phone script:

You: *Hello, my name is [name] and I live in [city/town]. I wanted to follow up on my request to meet with [member name] regarding [issue]. Is [member name] available to meet with me on [dates you are available]?*

Office: *I'm sorry—the Congressman/Senator isn't available on those dates.*

You: *Could you let me know some dates that they or a staff person might be available to meet with me? Thanks so much!*

Write down when you called and who you spoke with (ask the spelling of their name and email address), and if you don't hear back don't be afraid to follow-up! **Stay polite but persistent.**

If a member is persistently unavailable, ask to schedule a meeting with the Chief of Staff or Legislative Director (these are the top staffers in an office), or the equivalent for your local office. Make sure to remind the scheduler of the specific topics of your meeting so they can match you with a staffer with knowledge on your issue. See **Section II: Where to Start** of this toolkit to identify and contact the appropriate staffer yourself (optional).

- The day before your meeting, call your local office to confirm your appointment. They may ask for a list of who will be attending, if it is more than just you.
- The day of the meeting:
 - Dress appropriately (when in doubt, business casual).
 - Arrive at least 10 minutes before your meeting time.
 - You may be entering a building with security, so leave weapons, sharp objects, and food at home.
 - Write down what you want to say and bring it with you (use the seven steps at the top of the section).
 - Bring copies of any materials you would like to share with the attendees.
 - Afterwards, thank them for their time and leave your business card or contact information for any follow-up.
- After the meeting, follow-up with an email to thank them for their time and reiterate the requests you made in the meeting.

V. TALKING POINTS FOR THE DREAM ACT OF 2021 AND SUPPORT FOR DREAMERS

If you need a place to start, here are some general statistics and talking points on the Dream Act and those who would be covered under it. For more information, see **Section VI: Additional Resources** of this toolkit.

Statistics

- There are roughly **640,000** people with DACA status living in the United States, with about **1.3 million** more who are DACA eligible (see the numbers for your state [here](#)).
- The Dream Act of 2021 would provide a [path to legal status](#) for an estimated **1.7 million** people.
- The [average person eligible under this bill](#) came to the United States at the **age of six** and is now **25 years old**.
- Over **427,000 students** in U.S. college and universities are undocumented, **181,000** of which have DACA or are eligible for DACA.
- Undocumented youth contribute to the economy. DACA recipients alone contribute roughly **\$42 billion** to the [annual GDP](#) along with **\$5.7 billion** in federal taxes, and **\$3.1 billion** in state and local taxes [each year](#).
- DACA recipients are [parents to an estimated 256,000](#) U.S. citizen children.

Talking points

- DACA recipients, DREAMers, and other undocumented youth covered by this bill have lived in the United States since childhood, and many know the United States as the only home they can remember.
- These individuals are deeply rooted in their communities. They grew up here, were educated in the U.S. school system, and get jobs that give back to their communities just like any other resident.
- DACA recipients came forward and volunteered their personal information to the government in good faith, but now that same information could be used against them to target them for deportation if Congress does not act.
- This is an issue with bipartisan support: The [majority](#) of Americans, Republicans and Democrats, [support](#) a path to citizenship for immigrant youth. Such consensus is rare, especially on an immigration issue, and Congress must act now.

VI. RECENT LEGISLATION FAQ

A few common questions and answers regarding some of the bigger pieces of legislation geared toward undocumented immigrant youth.

Who is covered under the Dream Act of 2021?

According to the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, the [Dream Act of 2021](#) would cover an estimated [1.7 million people](#). After receiving conditional permanent residence (CPR) status, a person would be eligible for lawful permanent residence (LPR) status and eventual citizenship after meeting the following criteria:

- Be a long-term resident who came to the U.S. before the age of 18 and continuously present for four years before enactment of the bill
- Be a highschool graduate or have a GED

- Have acquired or completed at least two years of a bachelor degree or higher; worked lawfully for at least three years; or served in the military for at least two years
- Pass security and law enforcement background checks and pay an application fee
- Demonstrate proficiency in English language and knowledge of U.S. history
- Not have committed a felony or other serious crime and not pose a threat to national security

The length of time until a person can apply for citizenship can be a little complicated, but the quickest a person could apply is after **five years**. After receiving CPR status, a person would have **eight years** to meet the criteria for item three on the list above (college degree, work, or military service). Some may even already meet the criteria when they first receive CPR status. Once they meet the requirements, a person can have CPR status removed and be eligible for LPR status, or a green card. After a minimum of five years with CPR status, LPR status, or a combination of the two, that person can finally apply for citizenship.

Is this Dream Act different than the ones before?

The text of the [Dream Act of 2021](#) introduced to the Senate by Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) is [identical](#) to the Dream Act bills introduced in 2017 and 2019.

Is that different from the Dream and Promise Act?

The [American Dream and Promise Act](#) largely combines the Dream Act text with the American Promise Act. In addition to undocumented immigrant youth who came to the United States at a young age, the bill provides a pathway to citizenship for those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). The two bills do differ in some eligibility aspects, however, which you can explore [here](#) and [here](#).

What about TPS and DED holders?

[Many advocate](#) that any pathway to citizenship for immigrant youth and recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) must be paired with a pathway for TPS and DED, as they are all groups in need of a permanent solution beyond temporary status. Part of advocating for the Dream Act will be to demand an amendment to include TPS and DED holders.

Where does the U.S. Citizenship Act fall in all of this?

The [U.S. Citizenship Act](#) is a comprehensive immigration reform bill out of the Biden administration, introduced in both the House and the Senate, and covers a wide range of immigration issues. This includes the general text of the American Dream and Promise Act.

All these bills are on the federal level, what about state and local policies?

While federal immigration policy moves along, there is plenty happening at the state and local level. Some big issues affecting immigrant youth on the state and local level include:

- Access to higher education and in-state tuition
- State driver's licenses
- Professional and occupational licensing
- Public health benefits (particularly concerning COVID-19)

For more on state and local issues, see the [State and Local Immigration Project](#)

VII. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- TheDream.US [Resource Library](#)
- FWD.us [The Case for Protecting Dreamers](#)
- FWD.us [The Case for Protecting TPS Holders](#)
- CLINIC [2020 State Immigration Legislation in Review](#)
- CAP [Resources on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#)
- CAP [Analysis of DACA Renewals](#)
- [Comparison of DACA, Dream Act of 2019, and American Dream and Promise Act of 2019](#)
- CLASP [Fact Sheet on Promoting Equity for Undocumented Students in Postsecondary Education](#)
- USCIS [Approximate Active DACA Recipients: As of September 30, 2020](#)
- NILC [Summary of Key Provisions of the U.S. Citizenship Act](#)
- MPI [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\) Data Tools](#)
- MPI [Back on the Table: U.S. Legalization and the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate](#)
- Presidents Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration [How Many Undocumented Students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They?](#)