

**National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women --- Co-chaired
by:**

Web site: www.immigrantwomensnetwork.org

**Immigrant Women Program,
Legal Momentum**
1101 14th Street, N.W. Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 326-0040
iwp@legalmomentum.org

Family Violence Prevention Fund
383 Rhode Island St., Suite 304
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 252-8900
immigration@endabuse.org

ASISTA Immigration Assistance
3101 Ingersoll Ave
Des Moines, Iowa 50312
www.asistahelp.org

**DREAM ACT TO PROVIDE CRUCIAL HELP FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND GIRLS
FACT SHEET – (August 20, 2010)**

Passing the **DREAM Act (The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minor’s Act)** will greatly improve the lives, safety, well-being and economic capacity of immigrant women and children. The DREAM Act will open the door to college for undocumented immigrant graduates of U.S. high schools by creating a path to legal immigration status and allowing them to receive some limited forms federal financial aid, such as student loans. By providing access to higher education, this bill will foster the economic potential of a generation of young people and enhance the ability of the United States to compete internationally for generations. Immigrant women and girls face multiple obstacles to attending college, including access to work study programs, student loans and state funded financial aid. The impact on the lives of immigrant women, girls and their children is huge. The DREAM Act offers a path to legal immigration status for undocumented immigrant children who graduate from U.S. high schools and then go on to pursue higher education at our nation’s colleges and universities or join the U.S. armed forces. DREAM could vastly improve the lives and future economic productivity of immigrant children. DREAM could break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability immigrant women and their children often face by offering instead opportunity that will benefit their families, communities, and our country.

Path to Legal Residency for Talented Immigrant Youth

Under the DREAM Act, students who came to the U.S. at age 15 or younger and who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years and have good moral character will qualify for *conditional permanent resident status* upon graduation from a U.S. high school or being awarded a GED, and being accepted into college or the U.S. military. After completing two years of college or service in the U.S. armed forces, immigrant youth who have maintained good moral character and avoided lengthy trips abroad would be eligible to apply for and receive full lawful permanent residency. When the DREAM Act becomes law 57,000 immigrant women age 18 and older will become eligible to attain lawful permanent resident status as U.S. high school graduates who have received associates or higher degrees.¹ The DREAM Act will provide conditional legal immigration status to another 268,000 immigrant young women between the ages 18 and 34 who currently have a high schools diploma or GED enabling them to enter college or serve in the U.S. armed services.² Additionally, the DREAM Act will encourage greater numbers of immigrant children to complete high school by making up to 934,000 (436,000 female, 499,000 male) undocumented children currently under the age of 18 eligible for DREAM Act protections upon graduation from high school and pursuit of a higher education or an armed services career.³

¹ Migration Policy Institute, *DREAM vs. Reality: An Analysis of Potential DREAM Act Beneficiaries*. (July 2010) p.5 available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/DREAM-Insight-July2010.pdf>

² Id.

³ Id.

Each year, approximately 65,000 undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from U.S. high schools.⁴ They are honor role students, student leaders, star athletes, and award winners who aspire to be teachers, health care providers, scientists, technological entrepreneurs, doctors, and lawyers. But without access to legal immigration status and its educational opportunities, undocumented immigrant women are destined to a life of economic insecurity that precludes their ability to contribute fully to our communities. They cannot pursue higher education and cannot serve in the U.S. armed forces. They must instead work in the informal economy where, not only do they earn less, but they are vulnerable to exploitation, sexual violence and abuse.⁵ The prospect of such limited futures increases high school drop out rates among children from immigrant families. For example, over 22% of Latino youth drop out of high school.⁶

Income Benefits of Higher Education

Inability to access higher education is one of the main contributors to lower incomes among immigrants compared to native born citizens.⁷ Median annual incomes of immigrant men is nearly \$12,000 lower than native born U.S. citizen men. This income disparity is even greater for immigrant women, whose median income is \$16,562 lower than U.S. citizen men. Without access to higher education, bright young immigrants—a significant portion of the American workforce—will have limited access to the entrepreneurial opportunities and professional occupations necessary to reignite a thriving U.S. economy.

Impact on Immigrant Women and Families

Perhaps no group feels this harsh impact more than immigrant women and, consequently, the children and families they support. Undocumented immigrant women in America are often relegated to hourly or low-pay work in the informal sector, such as housekeepers, nannies, farm or sweatshop workers, where their academic potential is squandered. Furthermore, these jobs make no promises of fair wages, health care, retirement and, in many cases, their health and safety. History has shown that improving educational opportunities for girls improves the quality of life of the entire family, especially for the children. Conversely, limiting the prospects for immigrant girls increases the likelihood that they will drop out of school, experience unintended pregnancy as teenagers, or struggle to financially support their children.

Despite such obstacles, the desire among immigrants to break this cycle of poverty is strong. Eighty-six percent of Hispanic parents believe their children will be better off if they go to college.⁸ Yet nearly a third find that their children, despite academic qualifications, do not have the opportunity to attend college. The DREAM Act will help hundreds of thousands of women realize the hope that their children will have a better life, and will encourage future generations to seek an education.

For further information, please contact: Soraya Fata (sfata@legalmomentum.org) (202) 326-0040 or go to <http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/dream/index.htm>

⁴ JEFFREY S. PASSEL, Further Demographic Information Relating to the *DREAM Act*, (The Urban Institute, October 21, 2003).

⁵ The DREAM Act will provide enhanced economic opportunity for children and youth 43% of whom currently live in households earning under 149% of the poverty level.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks to the National Council of La Raza, July 28, 2009, available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-national-council-la-raza>

⁷ Migration Policy Institute, *DREAM vs. Reality: An Analysis of Potential DREAM Act Beneficiaries*. (July 2010) p.8 available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/DREAM-Insight-July2010.pdf>

⁸ Public Agenda, A Matter of Trust Ten Key Insights from Recent Public Opinion Research on Attitudes About Education Among Hispanic Parents, Students and Young Adults, pages 2 & 4 (May 2008).