

June 22, 2009

Undocumented Students Expect a Dream

By Annie Correal / EDLP

President Obama begins to discuss immigration reform this week



Thousands of young students around the country have come to protest in recent years to pressure the U.S. Congress to approve the draft of the Dream Act

Guadalupe, 16, closes her eyes and imagines herself in ten years.

"I'll be graduated, with my own office, giving consultations," said the girl, smiling. "I want to be a psychologist for children," she says.

With the current immigration policy, Guadalupe, who is here illegally, could not realize her dream of studying at an American university and a career in this country. Her parents brought from Mexico two years ago and now live in Queens .

But if passed the DREAM Act, or the Dream Act, the bill will allow thousands of Guadeloupe and more students attending U.S. universities as residents of country, with the possibility of becoming citizens.

This year, this legislation-which was first introduced in 2001 and narrowly defeated votes in 2007 - has bipartisan support in Congress and Senate.

President Barack Obama-who has said he supports it "100%" - opened the debate on immigration reform in Washington Thursday and many expect the DREAM Act is one of the first items on his agenda.

To benefit of DREAM Act, a student must have reached U.S. before age 16 and have lived in the country over five years. You must also have a high school diploma or general diploma (GED) and be of "good moral character" (not having committed any offense). If approved, the legislation would benefit about 65,000 students, according to the National Council of La Raza.

Young people who qualify for the DREAM Act would obtain permanent residency for six years, a period during which they should attend college and earn a degree in two or four years, or military service, to obtain citizenship. They could also receive loans and financial aid of state.

Supporters of the bill say it is a substitute for comprehensive immigration reform that would benefit all immigrants, but "a first step."

This is characterized Mayor Michael Bloomberg in May when it announced its support for the project Along with leaders of 18 major companies including American Express, Citibank and JPMorgan Chase.

"There are hundreds of thousands of children who are here illegally," the mayor said in a statement. "When I leave school, they face a sad reality that can extinguish the light of a bright future. Without access to borrow to study and legal jobs, many end up working for low pay, without papers, "said Bloomberg.

Those who oppose the DREAM Act say that it may exacerbate the financial crisis in nearly every state, and that he rewards those who have violated the law, giving them opportunities that belong to middle class families of this country.

Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) said the bill "destroys the hopes and dreams of countless American families who are struggling to create opportunities for their own children."

Guadalupe, short and with a sweet smile, made the journey from Mexico to New York when she was 14. During the trip, which lasted over a month, her family was attacked by criminals and locked up in a house on the border for two weeks.

Guadalupe remembered her trip in a book written this year by the students in her class on social justice. In the book, "At the edge of my new life," several young men/women recount their experiences crossing the border: they have to walk for days, crawl through sewers, hiding from helicopters, to observe the sexual abuse and death of other migrants.

But there is a chapter in the book, says **Natalia Aristizabal**, Professor of course of social justice, which is also an activist community organization **Make the Road New York**. It is the story of young immigrants after arrival in the U.S.

"One has adapted ... met here from Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, I learned new words, learned to ride the train, "said Guadalupe.

But young immigrants assimilate into the U.S. culture without a guarantee of future, says **Aristizabal**.

"They are strangers in two places," she says, and concludes: "These children are Americans by experience, not by title.