

## **SUPPORT OUR IMMIGRANT YOUTH: DREAM ACT OF 2017**

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Throughout our diocese, at Confirmations, parish and school visits, high school and college graduations, youth retreats, and other events and occasions, I meet and speak with our young people whose faith and commitment give me much hope for the Church. I see their enthusiasm and learn about their plans, hopes, and dreams for the future. Many are active in parish youth groups and serve the Church in a multitude of ways.

Among our active Catholic youth are our immigrant youth whose hopes and dreams for the future are not so bright. Blessed with a strong faith, they persevere despite living in anxiety and fear about deportation. I try to encourage them and assure them of the Church's love and support. Still, I worry about them. I think of the young men I have met who have discerned a call to the priesthood, yet they are blocked from pursuing their vocation due to their legal status. I think of the young women and men who have been protected by the DACA program (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), who now worry that this program will be rescinded, leaving them again in a situation of vulnerability to deportation.

This is a situation of moral urgency, which is why I chose to address it in this column. The Catholic Church in our country stands in solidarity with these youth and their families. I want them to know how much we appreciate and value them as members of the Church. We recognize their dignity and their contributions to the Church. We want their dignity to be protected. We recognize their God-given potential which they seek to realize.

The future of the DACA program, which has enabled approximately 800,000 undocumented immigrant youth in our country to receive a reprieve from deportation and legal work authorization, is in jeopardy. In June, ten state Attorneys General urged President Trump's Administration to end the DACA program and said that they would bring a lawsuit against the program if the Administration failed to do so. In response to this letter, Congress has begun to evaluate legislative solutions. A few weeks ago, the Senate and House of Representatives introduced the 2017 Dream Act to permanently protect DACA recipients and provide them with a path to citizenship.

The U.S. Bishops strongly support the Dream Act. We support this more permanent and humane solution to enable our immigrant youth to live their lives in dignity and free from the fear of deportation. Under this new bipartisan legislation, our immigrant youth would have the chance to earn permanent residency status and eventually to seek citizenship in our country. Besides the nearly 800,000 DACA recipients, another million immigrant youth would also be protected from deportation.

It is important to keep in mind that these young people entered the United States as children. The United States is their home. For many, English is their primary language. They have grown up in our country. They know America as their only home. With love for our country, some have even been serving in our armed forces. They need our love and support. I think of the immigrant youth in our diocese who have contributed to the life of the Church in our parishes and schools and are involved in service to others. They are our younger brothers and sisters in Christ.

I encourage your support of the DREAM Act of 2017. It is the right and compassionate course of action. I hope that our Senators and Representatives in Washington will set aside partisan differences and

**come together to enact this bill into law. Please encourage our U.S. Senators and Representatives to co-sponsor and support the Dream Act (Senate bill 1615/ House bill 3440). This legislation is greatly needed so that they can truly live “the American dream,” be freed from the fear and anxiety of deportation and separation from their families, and enabled to reach their God-given potential.**

**Finally, let us not forget the power of prayer. Please pray for our immigrant youth and their protection. I am especially asking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego for these young people. May God stir the hearts of our legislators to pass the Dream Act of 2017!**