



October Legislative Update



DREAM Act

Momentum around the federal DREAM Act has really picked up in recent months. Since the reintroduction of the DREAM Act in the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate on March 26th, 2009, our work has focused on encouraging Members of Congress to support the DREAM Act by becoming co-sponsors. Increasing the number of co-sponsors for the DREAM Act signals to the decision makers that there is overwhelming support for DREAM and that it will likely pass if brought to a vote. In the past month The DREAM Act has gained co-sponsors in the House and Senate including 10 of the 12 Democrats on the Senate Judiciary committee which has jurisdiction over the senate version. Currently there are 104 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and 31 co-sponsors in the Senate. To view an updated list of DREAM Act cosponsors check out this, <http://www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>

USSA and other DREAM Act advocates have met with congressional leadership to talk about ways to secure more DREAM Act co-sponsorship and the process for moving the DREAM Act forward in the legislative process. On Friday October 23rd, a congressional briefing about the DREAM Act was held for House and Senate staff to educate them about the bill and answer questions. Speakers at the briefing included DREAM students Herta Llusho and Noe Guzman who shared their personal testimonies, Louis Caldera, Senior Fellow with the Center for American Progress Action Fund and Dr. Robert G. Templin, Jr., president at Northern Virginia Community College.

On October 13th, Representative Luis Gutierrez (4-IL), Chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, made a released a statement outlining several priorities that are paramount for Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation. The DREAM Act was included has one of those priorities. The Obama Administration has indicated that it would like to see Congress move on Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation in 2010.

If passed, the DREAM Act would offer undocumented students with good moral character conditional permanent resident status. Conditional permanent resident status would be similar to lawful permanent resident status, except that it would be awarded for a limited duration—six years under normal circumstances. At the end of that six years, if a student receives a four or two year degree, remains in good academic standing for two years, or serves in the military, that conditional status becomes permanent. To qualify for benefits under the DREAM act, a student must have been in the United States 5 years before the law is enacted and before age 16. The latest version of the DREAM Act also includes a provision that caps eligibility for benefits under the DREAM Act at age 35.

Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act

Student Aid Reform is still on the move! It has been over a month since the House of Representatives passed the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, taking the first steps towards enacting the largest investment in higher education in American history. The US Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) committee is working to draft its version of the Student Aid reform that President Obama proposed back in April. Noted as the most significant higher education investment in United States history, SAFRA will directly improve the lives of current and future students in all facets of education. However meetings with senators on the HELP committee have indicated that the Senate Student Aid Reform bill will embrace similar priorities as the House bill. The bill is expected to be introduced into committee by Chairman Tom Harkin (IA) near the end of November.

The timeline for the student aid reform bill in the Senate is very closely tied to the timeline of Health Insurance reform. The student aid reform bill and health insurance bill will be reported out of the same committee, Health, Education, Labor and Pension. It is up to Senate leadership to determine the best timing to move both pieces of legislation.

Passed in the House with a vote of 273-171, SAFRA includes the following provisions to support students:

- Ending the Federal Family Education Loan Program, originating all new loans under the Direct Lending program and redirecting \$87 billion in savings to students.
- Investing \$40 billion to increase the maximum annual Pell Grant award to \$5,550 in 2010 and to \$6,900 by 2019.
- Starting in 2011, future increases to the Pell Grant will be linked to match rising costs-of-living by indexing it to the Consumer Price Index plus 1 percent.
- Investing \$3 billion to bolster college access and completion support programs for students.
- Infusing \$10 billion in Community Colleges to support growing demand.
- Investing \$2.55 billion in Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions.
- Ensuring all areas of public education are streamlined, SAFRA invests \$1 billion each year in competitive grants to challenge states to build a comprehensive, high quality early learning system for children birth to age 5.

The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act makes great strides to reform the federal student loan systems. The most controversial change is the transition away from the Federal Family and Education Loan Program (FFEL). SAFRA mandates that all new loans will be originating under the Direct Loans

program starting in July 2010. Ending the FFEL program frees up \$87 billion in federal student aid that will go toward areas of direct student support, not the wallets of bank executives.

Other reforms to student lending include keeping interest rates low on need-based – or subsidized – federal student loans and simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These changes will go a long way toward increasing the number of students able to access a higher education by making the lending process easier and more affordable. [Click here](#) to find out if your member of Congress voted YES on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act.

For more information on federal legislation or questions about this month's update please contact Angela Peoples, Legislative Director, at leg@usstudents.org or (202) 640-6570.