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Bishop Urges Passage of DREAM Act

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The DREAM Act creates a pathway through which undocumented immigrant students could obtain conditional permanent residency and, ultimately, American citizenship. After a six-year period of conditional permanent residency, these individuals could apply for citizenship if they had continued to demonstrate "good moral character," continued to live in the U.S., and completed at least two years of higher education or served at least two years in the military.

The DREAM Act has always had strong bipartisan support, and the U.S. Catholic bishops have been long standing supporters of this legislation.

On November 29, Bishop Robert W. Finn wrote to members of Missouri's congressional delegation urging them to support passage of the Dream Act. Following is his letter to Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO):

Dear Senator McCaskill,

Thank you for your previous commitment to vote for the DREAM Act, which would benefit thousands of young people here in the United States. I understand that the issue of immigration is a controversial one and one which the nation has grappled with for many years. To date, our elected officials have not been able to come to a fruitful compromise, one which protects the integrity of our nation's borders and security but also provides a humane solution for the millions of persons now in limbo. It might take more time before the nation reaches consensus on how best to fix our national immigration system.

At the current moment, however, our federal elected officials can provide a remedy for a very vulnerable group of immigrants – young persons who entered the United States with their parents years ago. Their futures are limited because of their undocumented status, yet they have so much to give to our communities and nation.

These young people entered the United States as children, following the direction of their parents, as we would all do in the same situation. The United States is the only country that they know. They have incredible talent and energy and are waiting for the chance to fully contribute their skills to our country. We would be foolhardy to deny them that chance.

The United States is a great country because it is a land of opportunity. We have given newcomers the opportunity to work hard and be successful, and it has benefited our country immensely.

Today, I am asking you to remember how we are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants and that we, too, have benefited from this opportunity and the American values of fairness, compassion, and hard work. With the passage of the DREAM Act, we can welcome a new generation of Ameri-

cans who will one day become the leaders of our communities.

In the past attempts have been made to attach the DREAM Act to legislation that would fund abortions at military hospitals and legislation that would repeal the military policy "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" regarding homosexuals serving in the military. I, along with the entire body of U.S. Bishops, oppose these other pieces of legislation and therefore I could not ask you to vote for the DREAM Act if it were attached to such policies that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is my hope that the DREAM Act could be removed from such politics and receive a fair vote on its own merits.

I also ask you to put aside politics in this instance and to vote on the merits of the proposal. There are times when a proposal should be enacted because, simply put, it is the right thing to do. This legislation is one of those times. On behalf of the Catholic community of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, I urge you to vote in favor of the DREAM Act. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

In Christ and Mary,

+Most Reverend Robert W. Finn
Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph