

DREAM Sabbath Press Conference Article



DREAM Act Sabbath

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Faith leaders join Sen. Durbin to announce fall campaign

By Wayne Rhodes, Editor, Faith in Action



Sen. Richard Durbin (far left) listens as United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño discusses the importance of passing the DREAM Act during a press conference at the U.S. Capitol.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño was among a coalition of interfaith leaders from across the country that joined Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin, D-Ill., in the U.S. Capitol to announce a DREAM Act Sabbath.

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The bill, “Development, Relief & Education for Alien Minors (DREAM),” gives undocumented students a chance to earn legal status if they came here as children, are long-term U.S. residents, have good moral character, and complete two years of college or military service in good standing.

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition is organizing the campaign with support from United We Dream. The organizations hope to have many DREAM students speak to congregations throughout the campaign. The Interfaith Immigration Coalition will prepare a DREAM Act Sabbath packet, including a video, to assist faith leaders in educating and mobilizing their congregations.

10 years

Durbin introduced the DREAM Act 10 years ago. He has been relentlessly pursuing its passage ever since. He said DREAM Act students have “a passion and commitment crucial to the future of America.”

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The act is based on a fundamental moral principle, according to Durbin. “It’s wrong to punish children for acts of their parents,” he explained, adding that every faith tradition recognizes a moral right to protect the vulnerable.

“These young people deserve a chance to become legal residents of the country they know as home,” said Bishop Carcaño, one of 12 religious leaders who joined Durbin and Sen. Michael Bennett, D-Colo., to announce the campaign. She chairs the United Methodist Council of Bishops committee on immigration and heads an interagency task force of the denomination.

She is episcopal leader of the Desert Southwest Conference, headquartered in Phoenix, Ariz.

Harsh immigration laws

“Because these young people were brought to this country as young children and never received legal documentation,” Carcaño said, “at every turn they face the harshness of this country’s immigration laws that make no room for the compassionate care of children and young people like them.”

Why would we not want to embrace ... characteristics that have made our nation great?

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, said it would be to the United States’ detriment to forsake DREAM Act students. “Why would we not want to embrace their dedication, energy, talents and courage, characteristics that have made our nation great?” he asked. McCarrick emphasized that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops supports the DREAM Act.

The National Assn. of Evangelicals also stands strongly behind the DREAM Act, according to the Rev. Derrick Harkins, senior pastor, Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, and a member of the association’s board of directors. “No matter what side of the aisle [our elected officials] occupy,” he said, “it is an opportunity for them to do what is right morally.”

The president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the largest Latino Christian organization in America, said that “without a doubt,” Christ stood committed to the care of the most vulnerable, especially children. “To continue to punish these children is nothing less than anti-Christian, anti-American and morally reprehensible,” said the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez.

Saved a whole society

Rabbi Lisa Grushcow, associate rabbi at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York City, is from Canada and in the process of earning her U.S. citizenship. She and other faith leaders held up Joseph as an immigrant who made a difference. “Not only did Joseph help his family,” she pointed out, “but he saved a whole society [Egypt].”



Other faith leaders participating in the press conference included Sister Simone Campbell, executive director, NETWORK; the Rev. Richard Graham, bishop, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Rabbi Doug Heifetz, Oseh Shalom Congregation, Laurel, Md; the Rt. Rev. David Jones, bishop, Diocese of Virginia, The Episcopal Church; Dr. Fred Kniss, provost, Eastern Mennonite University; Imam Mohamed Magid, president, Islamic Society of North America; and Father Jack Orzechowski, OFM, Franciscan Friar, the Holy Name Province.

Gabby Pacheco, a DREAM Act student who saw her parents and sisters taken away from her home in an Immigration & Customs Enforcement van, participated in the press conference also. She described the arrest as the scariest experience of her life.

Sen. Bennett, former superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, said the DREAM Act is a bipartisan issue, and a “common sense way to adjust the law.”

Durbin said supporters of the DREAM Act Sabbath will do their best to build a movement across America. He said the religious leaders will decide what’s appropriate for their own faith community.

“I support comprehensive immigration reform,” Durbin stressed. He acknowledged that the DREAM Act is part of a larger discussion, and described it as “an accepted starting point.”

