

Source: Legislative Gazette

Remove Images

DREAMers: Undocumented unafraid and unapologetic

by JOSEFA VELASQUEZ

March 11, 2013

Undocumented, unafraid, unapologetic," t-shirts were donned by the nearly 200 college-bound students at a DREAM Act rally last Tuesday in the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Albany.

The undocumented high school students traveled to the capital to call on Gov. Andrew Cuomo to include the DREAM Act in this year's budget and to lobby lawmakers to support the legislation.

The New York state DREAM Act (A.2597/S.2378) co-sponsored by Assemblyman Francisco Moya, D-Queens; Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan; and Sen. Jose Peralta, D-Queens, would allow the children of undocumented immigrants to apply for state tuition assistance. New York would follow California, New Mexico and Texas which all passed similar legislation in 2001.

Late last week, Silver announced a \$25 million budget proposal to fund the New York state DREAM Act.

"These students, many of them who have lived the vast majority of their lives in the United States, are far too often condemned to a life of poverty because they cannot afford to attend college," said executive vice president of the New York State United Teachers Andrew Pallotta. "This is unfair and this situation hurts students and hurts our society. These students cannot obtain financial assistance for college and often are unable to find regular employment or decent housing."

A recent report by the Fiscal Policy Institute found that passing the legislation will reap a large economic benefit to the state as college graduates typically earn an additional \$25,000 a year, which, in return, means \$3,900 more per year, per student, in state and local taxes.

An analysis by the Fiscal Policy Institute also concluded that the DREAM legislation would increase the cost of the state's Tuition Assistance Program by \$17 million, which represents 2 percent of the current TAP expenditures.

"I believe in a New York where an immigration status should never be a barrier for young



There is a growing movement to allow undocumented immigrants to apply for state and federal financial aid. Advocates of the policy say a better educated workforce will help grow the economy *Photo by Tanique Williams.*



Assemblyman Francisco Moya is the lead sponsor in the New York state DREAM Act, which would open up state financial aid to undocumented, college bound students. *Photo by Tanique Williams.*

undocumented college-bound students getting a good quality education," said Moya. "We have a historic vote that came out of the higher education committee that [is] going to bring the DREAM Act to the floor in a few weeks and [Sheldon Silver is] fighting to include the DREAM Act in this year's budget."

The Executive Budget must be passed by April 1, but lawmakers are pushing to pass the budget as early as next week. Advocates are treating the item with a sense of urgency.

"You need access to higher education, regardless of how you got to this country. You have been successful in the educational system so far and you need to continue to have that access so you can one day be like my friend Francisco Moya or myself," said Sen. Gustavo Rivera, D-Bronx.

According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, if the DREAM Act was to be financed through the state income tax it would only cost a typical taxpayer, who has an adjusted gross annual income of \$45,000 to \$49,999, 87 cents per year, "less than the price of a donut."

Sen. Adriano Espaillat, D-Manhattan, took the chance to reaffirm to the "Dreamers" that their education is in the best interest of the state.

"The best economic development program is you. If we get you to go to college and we get you to become engineers and doctors and scientists and teachers you will be paying taxes and you will be buying homes, you will be opening up businesses," said Espaillat.

Others offered a warning that New York needs to keep up with the progressive immigration police.

"As Washington debates federal immigration reform, now is the time for Gov. Cuomo and New York state to show leadership by including New York State DREAM legislation, including access to TAP, in the state budget," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition in a press release. "As a national leader in immigration issues, New York cannot fall behind and fail to do what is right for its undocumented students and the state's economy."

The same urgency was used by Espaillat, who cites the federal immigration issue as a reason to push the state DREAM Act.

"There's a consensus in Washington that the DREAM Act should pass and yet New York state is still lagging behind not ready to move forward and say that we are supporting [the legislation]," said Espaillat. "In fact there is an indication that we want to wait for Washington to do it so we don't have to do it ourselves."

In late February a bipartisan group of eight senators, including New York's Charles Schumer, D-Brooklyn, Marco Rubio, R-Florida, and former presidential candidate John McCain, R-Arizona, commonly referred to as the "Gang of Eight, unveiled an immigration reform proposal that would set a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

The federal immigration reform proposed by the "Gang of Eight" would give priority to Dreamer's, children who were brought to the United States by their parents through no fault of their own.

Moya took the chance to criticize the Republican controlled state Senate which he says is trailing behind the national party.

"We have to get the Republican controlled state Senate to do the right thing. The national tide is turning," said Moya. "A month ago Eric Cantor, the number two most powerful Republican in Congress was completely opposed to the DREAM Act, [and now he] came out and supported us. So we're seeing once again that the New York state Republican Party is lagging behind their own national party on doing the right thing. They want to court our vote? Well they better start putting our priorities up front."

Last Thursday, dreamers and Hispanic leaders from across the state issued an open letter to Schumer about their concerns on his immigration stance.