

Act is DREAM-catcher for Maryland

By: Veronica Cool Special to the Daily Record October 25, 2012



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The Maryland DREAM Act is the right thing to do. It's best for our state's economic well being to ensure that all bright and talented students have a fair shot at higher education. Maryland is now a net exporter of student talent. And two-thirds of students who leave Maryland for higher education do not return. That's a worrisome trend, because over the next 20 years, at least six of the 10 fastest-growing fields in Maryland will require college degrees.

Studies show that students with college degrees are far more likely than their peers with only high school degrees to be active members of their communities and to earn significantly more money over the course of their careers.

The College Board has found that the median earnings of bachelor's degree recipients working full-time year-round in 2008 were \$55,700, \$21,900 more than the median earnings of high school graduates.

Economic benefits

A recent study by the University of Maryland Baltimore County found that the Maryland DREAM Act will lead to major long-term economic benefits to the tune of \$66 million per class of DREAM students who further their education thanks to this common-sense piece of legislation.

The students who would be directly affected by the Maryland DREAM Act are Marylanders in all but paperwork — kids who were brought to this country at a young age and grew up in our communities, went to our schools and whose families pay the same Maryland taxes as we all do.

On Nov. 6, Maryland voters have the opportunity to echo our state legislature on this issue, upholding the bill that was signed into law last year and which we can rightly consider a momentous achievement. Without the Maryland DREAM Act, the dreams of too many talented, hard-working students in our midst will be put on hold.

We aren't alone in our statewide quest for expanded education and opportunity. We're one of a dozen states that have passed similar legislation to ensure that students who've grown up in our neighborhoods and attended our schools won't be charged the higher out-of-state

tuition rate (putting college out of reach for the vast majority of DREAM students) but can pay the same in-state tuition rate as their peers.

In states like Texas, California and Kansas, which have had state DREAM Act legislation on the books for a number of years, a small number of students have enrolled thanks to the DREAM Act. In fact, DREAM students have made up less than 1 percent of the overall university student population in each state with similar legislation.

Students who qualify for the Maryland DREAM Act must have attended a Maryland high school for at least three years and graduated.

Investing in future

Investing in these young people's dreams is investing in the future of our state and making good on the excellent K-12 education our teachers work so hard to provide. Empowering all smart and dedicated kids to go to college guarantees that our primary educational investment bears fruit, and we take advantage of these student's ideas, creativity and passion to build a competitive workforce.

Finally, this law isn't about handing out scholarships (undocumented immigrants aren't even eligible for state or federal financial aid) or taking away slots from other Maryland students. Many people don't even know that the legislation was clearly written to avoid any competition between U.S. citizens from Maryland and DREAM Act students — the law stipulates that DREAM students are considered in the pool of out-of-state applicants, so they won't take any in-state slots. In short, we are creating a more qualified pool of talented, productive employees who will generate taxes and spend and invest more in our state.

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