

Commentary: Make the Dream Act more than a dream, finally

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Dreamers are young people brought to the United States as infants, toddlers or young children by their parents. This, above all other immigration issues, long has been the focus of our broken immigration system.

The Dream Act first was introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2001, 20 years ago. Think about where you were and what you were doing 20 years ago. These children now are working adults with families of their own.

A Dream Act has been on the floor of the Senate every year since 2001. Why? Because there is a biblical principle at play here. We should not punish children for the offenses of their parents.

These particular immigrant parents have come to our country unlawfully or, nearly as often, overstayed a lawful temporary visa for many reasons, some of them very sympathetic, but they did violate U.S. immigration law. However, the children whom they brought with them, who usually had no say in the decision to come to the United States, should not be held responsible for this violation of law.

Dreamers, including those currently protected by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, should have an expedited process to become U.S. citizens. Their parents and other undocumented immigrants who came as adults also should have the chance to earn U.S. citizenship over time, but it's fair to ask them to pay a fine as restitution for having violated U.S. immigration laws. Most, in my experience, would be more than willing to do so for the chance to get right with the law.

How I got to this point

In 2009, I was invited to teach, along with several other women in our women's ministry. I was excited. This would be my first opportunity to teach, to be a part of the women's ministry. My assignment was to teach on hospitality—or [*philoxenia*](#) in Greek—defined as “love of strangers.”

As I began researching, I realized this was not going to be a popular subject. I expressed my concern with our group leader, who took a deep breath and said: “Well, Brenda, I did not choose you, nor did I choose the subject matter. However, I do know this is what you have been called to do.” I did not realize at the time that God was preparing me for something new.

As I would learn, the Bible makes abundantly clear God loves immigrants and commands his people to love and seek justice for them. The defeat of the Dream Act in 2010 was when I began praying for justice for these remarkable young people known as Dreamers.

A Christian response to immigrants

Throughout the Bible, God commands his people to love and seek justice for vulnerable foreigners. In the gospels, Jesus reserves some of his harshest words of judgment for those who would cause a child to stumble.

Christians who take these biblical principles as their authority have an opportunity to advocate for a policy change that would rectify a longtime stumbling block built into our immigration laws. The longstanding policy prevents individuals brought to the United States as children—who were too young to make that decision for themselves—from becoming fully integrated U.S. citizens. As a Christian, I believe it's past time for our elected officials to make this right.

We all recognize the passages throughout the Bible about the vulnerable groups we are called to love, to treat justly, and to protect from exploitation and mistreatment—orphans, widows and the poor. However, if we look a little closer, these passages include immigrants.

One way we can demonstrate love to immigrant children is by urging our elected officials finally to pass the Dream Act to allow vulnerable immigrants to move forward with productive lives. Doing so also will restore immigrants' faith in God and country.

Political responses to immigrants

More than any other group, Dreamers have been bounced around like a political football. Over the past 15 years, both Republican and Democrat presidents have tried, but ultimately failed, to reform our immigration laws comprehensively.

Failure to pass the Dream Act in 2010 led to the executive order in 2012 known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. DACA enabled almost 800,000 eligible young adults to work lawfully, attend school and plan their lives without the constant threat of deportation. However, unlike federal legislation, DACA did not provide permanent legal status to individuals and must be renewed every two years.

DACA recipients and other Dreamers who have been educated in the United States are contributing in many ways as workers, taxpayers, entrepreneurs and consumers. A pending court challenge in Texas could lead them to lose their ability to work lawfully.

After our society has invested in their education, it would be poor stewardship to deny them the ability to work and contribute back to this community. The only way to provide them that certainty permanently is for Congress to work on a bipartisan basis to pass the Dream Act.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and Democratic Senator Dick Durbin recently re-introduced the Dream Act. 2021 could be the year my prayers are answered. But it will take senators like John Cornyn, who has expressed his commitment for a solution for Dreamers, to hear our support for a bipartisan Dream Act.

Please [contact Senator Cornyn](#), and ask him to be a co-sponsor on the Dream Act 2021. Polls have shown the majority of Americans, including evangelical Christians like me, support this legislation.

Brenda Kirk has been an advocate for the Evangelical Immigration Table since 2012. The views expressed are those solely of the author.