

## Don't deport our "dreamers"; DACA bill earns physician support

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The AMA has expressed its support for the "Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy Act," a bipartisan, bicameral bill that would provide protection from deportation for undocumented young immigrants—often called "dreamers"—who have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.

The letter was sent Monday to the U.S. Senate sponsors of the bill (S. 128), Illinois Democrat Richard Durbin and South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham. Reps. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., and Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill., who also received a letter of support, have introduced the bill in the House (H.R. 496).

"I do not believe we should pull the rug out and push these young men and women—who came out of the shadows and registered with the federal government—back into the darkness," Graham said in a press release.

The proposed law, called the BRIDGE Act for short, would offer people who meet certain requirements the opportunity to apply for protected legal status and work authorization for three years. The bill would "provide important protection and stability until a permanent solution on lawful immigration status for DACA recipients is implemented," AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, wrote.

DACA's impact has been felt in medicine. More than 60 medical schools considered applications from students with DACA status for the 2016 – 2017 academic year, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. In the coming decades, DACA protections could enable as many as 5,400 previously ineligible people to join the U.S. physician workforce, the AMA's letter says.

In addition to expressing its backing of the bill, the AMA also imparted its support for the students and physicians with DACA status, "as well as any young people considering a career in medicine," Dr. Madara wrote. "DACA recipients should be able to continue to study and work without fear of being

deported.”

Those holding DACA status have become known colloquially as “dreamers,” after the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minor (DREAM) Act that failed to secure passage in Congress but formed the basis for President Obama’s DACA program, initiated through executive order in June 2012.

## Students speak out

When *AMA Wire*® asked students with DACA status and students who support the program to share their personal stories, the responses poured in. One came from Diana Andino, a medical student at Loyola University Chicago’s Stritch School of Medicine and DACA recipient.

“My parents brought me from Ecuador in search of an opportunity to have a better education and future,” Andino said. “Some obstacles I encountered, like not having a driver’s license or not being able to apply to school nor work, have now disappeared. Once I was granted DACA, I knew that my aspiration of becoming a physician would be possible.”

“As an immigrant, I will be able to relate to people [who] are facing challenges and not only understand the culture of the ever-growing Hispanic population, but of the rest of minorities,” she said. “I believe it is important for other people to see the great impact that [we], dreamers, can have in our communities. It is time to enhance the care for our future patients, and we can become linguistically and culturally competent healthcare providers.”

Look for more dreamers’ stories soon on *AMA Wire*.