



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Martin Malavé Dilan

## DREAM Act Forum Draws Emotional, Compelling Testimony

MARTIN MALAVÉ DILAN May 30, 2014



**By Lolita Avila**

Illegal aliens will get a free ride to college with American citizens tax dollars. According to the New York State Youth Leadership Council, this is a DREAM Act myth. The misconception is one of the many reasons why the New York State Senate Democratic Conference decided to hold [a forum to promote and dispel](#) inaccurate information about this legislation.

The [NY DREAM Act](#) will allow undocumented students the opportunity to receive state financial aid. Act Sponsor Senator Peralta was joined by Senator Stewart-Cousins, Senator

Dilan, Senator Perkins and other supporting colleagues at the morning forum. Also in attendance were various education and fiscal experts as well as three inspiring “DREAMers” sharing their individual stories.

On March 17, the Dream Act was brought to the senate floor. However, it fell short by 2 votes, with 30 ayes and 29 nays. A bill similar to the Dream Act was first introduced in 2002 and it has been a topic of discussion since then. It has undergone many revisions, and gained numerous supporters along the way.

Executive Director for Fiscal Policy Institute, Fred Floss discussed the costs and benefits of the New York State Dream Legislation based on an analysis produced in 2012. According to Floss, the enactment would cost approximately \$17 million. Floss emphasized that this price is a mere 2 percent of the Tuition Assistance Program’s current expenditures.

Deputy State Comptroller Ken Bleiwas echoed Floss by stating that the Dream Act will be a great investment for New York in the long run. Bleiwas argues that the access to financial aid will encourage more undocumented students to go to college. As a result this bill will produce a more educated workforce which leads to higher paying jobs. On average, the recipient of 4 year degree is expected to earn \$25,000 more per year than a person who only obtains a high school diploma. Therefore, \$3,900 per year would be spent on state and local taxes. A 2 year degree graduate ideally earns \$10,000 more than a person with an average high school diploma. This results in an additional \$1,000 dollars a year that can be reinvested.

According to the 2012 Fiscal Policy Institute analysis, if by any means the Dream Act was financed through the state income tax it would cost at most \$4.95 per year for a person who annual salary grosses \$150,000 to \$199,000. A median taxpayer who earns \$45,000 to \$49,000 will only pay \$.87 cents per year. Floss reiterated on various occasions that the price is less than the cost of a donut.

The current law prohibits undocumented students from receiving state financial assistance for higher education institutions including academic performance awards. Thus preventing thousands of students from advancing to college because of cost barriers.

Some panelists tested the logic behind allowing undocumented students to attend public schools from elementary through high school, to then not provide those same students minimal grant opportunities to continue their education.

One panelist, Dominique Hernandez shared her struggles of how she had to pay her way through Queens College, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. She was one of the lucky students who was able to work off the books, however it took her 6 years to graduate instead of the initial 4 years due to lack of financial support. Another DREAMER, Bronx native Lupe Ambrosio, became teary eyed as she spoke of her disappointment because the DREAM Act was once again denied.

"Politics came before our education," said Ambrosio, a graduate of the New York State high school. She has aspirations of becoming a teacher but has yet to attend college due to its extreme cost.

The individual testimonials from the DREAMers put the entire forum into perspective. A fierce sense of urgency is needed to make the DREAM Act a reality. Participants in the forum unanimously agree that enacting this program is the right thing to do. It is about fundamental fairness and justice. Many of the undocumented students have called New York home for the majority of their lives and have grown up in New York State education system since elementary school.

With the presence of the Statue of Liberty New York State titles itself as the beacon of hope and freedom. We must live up to our description of a progressive state. "The fight is not

over,” Senator Peralta said in closing.

He reassured that supporting Senators, including DREAM Act co-sponsor Senator Dilan, will continue to work day-in-and-day-out to get the DREAM Act passed.