

**2016 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA
NYS Catholic Conference
Council of Catholic Charities Directors**



NEW YORK STATE DREAM ACT

Summary

The New York State DREAM ACT will provide opportunities for immigrant students who meet certain criteria to be eligible for financial aid to assist them attend institutions of higher education.

Conference Position

The Catholic Conference and the Council of Catholic Charities Directors has long advocated for a comprehensive immigration reform package at the federal level that includes an earned legalization program, secure borders that reduce risk to individuals, and change in the immigration system that promotes family unity. In the interim there are steps that can be taken at the state level to improve the current situation. This legislation is one such effort.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the New York State Catholic Conference have voiced support for the federal Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Likewise, we support this state legislation that we believe will afford deserving young immigrants an opportunity to pursue post-secondary education.

Rationale

This bill is an attempt to allow young people who have demonstrated a commitment to education and who are of good moral character to access financial aid opportunities without regard to immigration status, and would create a mechanism to raise money for college scholarships for the children of immigrants. Other states have passed similar legislation and New York State, with its history of welcoming immigrants, should be at the forefront of these efforts to support immigrant populations who have contributed so much to the vitality of the state. The chance to earn a higher education degree will allow these immigrant students to realize their potential and make a great contribution to our economy.

Currently immigrants receive elementary and secondary education without regard to their immigration status. Many of these children have lived in this country from a very early age and know no other country as home. However, once they have their high school diplomas in hand, they are often blocked from continuing their education for financial reasons. The Commission established in this bill would raise funds to provide scholarships to deserving students who would be required to have taken steps to regularize their immigration status. These students would also be eligible for other awards and scholarships that would advance their educational opportunities. Parents and family members of students would also be eligible to participate in the NYS College Savings Program with an individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN).