

### Aiding Undocumented Students

On a dark stormy night, thirty-year old single mother, Consuelo Ramirez, and her three year old daughter, Maria Ramirez, are trying to cross the border between the United States and Mexico. Consuelo knows that by crossing the border she both is breaking the law and putting her and her daughter at risk. She overlooks all the risks she is taking; she cannot take one more day of seeing her daughter cry of hunger. As soon as Consuelo reaches the United States she finds a job in the fields, picking apricots and melons in Planada, California. Fifteen years pass. Consuelo is now working as a house cleaner and has even learned English. Maria is now an eighteen year old student that has graduated from La Grand High School. Her hard work and dedication has earned her a spot on the honor roll. Many of her teachers encourage her to go to college and get a higher education. With her love for math and science, Maria wishes to become a doctor and help fight the war against cancer which killed her father. Even though she has been practically raised in an American society Maria is still an illegal immigrant. She calls Planada, California her home. Maria knows nothing of Guadalajara, Mexico where she was born. She is now in a position in her life, in which she will have to decide whether going to college and facing financial troubles because of high tuition prices, illegally working laborious jobs or returning to her unfamiliar country of birth. None of Maria's options seem like a settling future to her.

There are sixty-five thousand graduating high school students each year in the United States like Maria Ramirez. American is what they consider themselves, for they have lived in the United States, yet they are ostracized after high school and labeled as "illegal aliens." Many of these students wish to go to college and make a change in the world. Although there is no law

prohibiting undocumented students from getting higher education, there are still many that find it nearly impossible to receive a college education. The problem is that since these students do not have a social security number, they cannot receive financial aid. Therefore, unless their parents have found really good jobs and are well off financially, many of these students cannot afford to attend college. California has now given the opportunity for undocumented students like Maria Ramirez to be able to afford college. As of 2013 thousands of undocumented will be granted Cal Grants. Granting these students the opportunity to afford college is the correct thing to do because a person who has been living in the United States for most of his/her life should not be labeled or treated as anything else but American.

An “illegal alien” is a foreigner who does not owe allegiance to our country; and who has violated our laws and customs in establishing residence in our country. He or she is therefore a criminal under applicable U.S laws. (Definitions). The definition of an “illegal alien” is pretty clear. We cannot ignore the fact the arrival to the United States of many undocumented students was unlawful, but more importantly we need to analyze the many of these student’s situation and recognize who was at fault. These young adults like Maria were brought to the United States as young kids; many of them do not even remember the journey. Their parents made the conscious decision to bring many of these kids into the United States illegally. Stanislaus State University’s faculty member in the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, Dr. Jim Riggs, invites people to reevaluate the term illegal; “If one looks at someone that has gone to high school for three or more years and graduated, I don’t think we can categorize them as sneaking into the country...maybe we should revisit the issue of what is illegal...and address it in their status.” (Riggs). Dr. Riggs is right; we cannot continue to classify these students as criminals.

These undocumented students have received a k-12 education and taken part of society just as well as other U.S born citizen, therefore they should be serve as citizens.

Undocumented students feel the burden of being labeled as illegal immigrants when planning their educational future. Only forty-nine percent of undocumented students between the age of eighteen and twenty-four attend or have attended college (Passel & Cohn, 2009). A major reason why students like Maria Ramirez, do not attend a University is cost.

Undocumented students have higher tuition cost, because in most states undocumented students are classified as non-residents. As non-residences students are charged with three to seven times more than the cost of in-state tuition. Luckily for undocumented students that live in California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin, these students are charged in-state tuition rates (Olivas) under the Assembly Bill 540 which was passed on October 2001. Students that benefit from this bill are referred to as AB540 students. Although the AB540 bill may be a good step for undocumented students, it does not completely help. For families living in poverty like Maria Ramirez's the cost of tuition is still too costly. If Maria were a resident she would get the full amount of financial aid being able to get the education she deserves. Unfortunately without a law that provides undocumented students like Maria with financial aid, these students and their families are left with if the financial burden of tuition.

The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors, better known as the DREAM Act, seeks to ease some barriers that undocumented students face. This is a Bill that has been introduced to Congress since 2001 and every following year has been reintroduced. The bill consists of providing financial aid to undocumented students seeking to obtain a higher education and lead them on a path toward citizenship. In order to qualify, students must have

entered the country as a minor, lived in the United States for at least five subsequent years, graduated from high school in the United States and have a clean record as a minor. Students that meet the qualifying criteria would then be given six years of residency in which they would have to complete at least a two-year degree in a college or as part of the military (The DREAM Act). Although this would greatly benefit aspiring students like Maria Ramirez, the bill has been rejected every single time it has been introduced.

California introduced a bill similar to the Dream Act. The bill was signed and made into a law by Governor Brown October 2011 which would take effect would take effect in 2013. As of 2013, undocumented students will be able to receive financial aid (Stepman). Republican Tim Donnelly, chairman of the fifty-ninth district in the California State Assembly, opposes to the dream act on moral grounds; “It's morally wrong...we have just created a new entitlement that is going to cause tens of thousands of people to come here illegally from all over the world" (McGreevy). He may be right. The AB540 may sound enticing to people from other countries, but should the United States continue to feed poverty into the country instead of investing in the country's future? Young men and women like Maria Ramirez feel like Americans and plan to live in the United States because it is the country they can call home. Remaining in the United States without financial aid to receive a higher education leaves undocumented students with one choice, working laborious jobs which would lead students to live life in poverty just like that of their parents. Once people from other countries hear of the financial help for students, it may encourage more people to illegally enter the United States, but students like Maria Ramirez, who entered the country unconsciously, should not continue to pay the price of having an ineffective homeland security.

Sixty-five thousand undocumented students in the United States are left on a limbo upon high school graduation. Their unconscious illegal arrival to the United States as minors leaves these students without financial help to further their education. Many of these students' families lack the financial means to support a college education even at in-state tuition rates. Providing financial aid is the correct thing to do for undocumented students and the country.

Undocumented students that grew up in the United States, view the country as their own, and most will continue reside in the country. Providing financial aid will serve as an investment in the country's future.

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