



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
Services, Inc.

March 12, 2021

Senator Richard Durbin  
711 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC  
20510

Senator Lindsey Graham  
290 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC  
20510

Dear Senator Durbin and Senator Graham:

On behalf of the more than 122,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), we are writing in support of S. 264, the Dream Act of 2021. We thank you both for introducing this important bipartisan legislation. Based on psychological research, this bill helps hardworking, young immigrants, who have already demonstrated their strong work ethic and potential, to be able to remain in the United States. We sincerely hope that Congress can find a permanent legislative solution to protect undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children.

APA is the nation's largest scientific and professional nonprofit organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology. APA has more than 122,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students. Through the application of psychological science and practice, our association's mission is to make a positive impact on critical societal issues across the states. Many APA members serve immigrant youth and adults in a wide range of settings, including schools, clinics, community centers, hospitals and refugee resettlement centers.

### **Impact of Fear of Deportation**

Immigrants often experience fear of deportation. Research demonstrates that adult immigrants who fear deportation are much more vulnerable to heart disease, asthma, diabetes, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>1</sup>. Enduring effects seen in children include:

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, S. W., & Baily, C. D. Parental deportation, families, and mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.*(2013). 52(5), 451-453.

Allen, B., Cisneros, E. M., & Tellez, A. The children left behind: the impact of parental deportation on mental health. *Journal of Child and Family Studies.* (2015). 24(2), 386-392.

Brabeck, K., & Xu, Q. The impact of detention and deportation on Latino immigrant children and families: A quantitative exploration. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences.* (2010). 32(3), 341-361.

- Emotional and behavioral changes or difficulties;
- Sleep and eating disturbances;
- Excessive crying;
- Increased fear;
- Poorer academic performance, and
- Aggressive and withdrawn behavior in older youth.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, many of the immigrant youth and family members involved have already experienced traumatic and stressful circumstances in their home countries. The fear of deportation could exacerbate the psychological trauma that these immigrants have already experienced.

This legislation would help alleviate stress experienced by immigrants by eliminating their fear of deportation. Specifically, psychological and medical research on child trauma and migration stressors shows that successive traumatic events—including deportation-related experiences, such as immigration raids and exposure to violence in home countries—put children at risk for the development of a range of disorders, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>3</sup>

### **Keeping Families Together**

Based on the research that indicates the deleterious effects of parent-child separation, APA strongly supports policies that keep families together. Although Dreamers are primarily young adults, if the Dream Act of 2021 is not passed, they could be separated from their parents who are U.S. citizens. They could also face separation from their own U.S.-born citizen children.

S. 264 proposes meaningful legislative changes that enable families to stay together. Sudden and unexpected family separation is associated with stress and emotional trauma for children, housing instability, food insecurity, interrupted education and behavioral/emotional responses, such as aggression and changes to sleep and appetite. Parental separation can also have a long-term negative impact on children in adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

As an organization of psychologists, we have serious concerns about sending young immigrants back to dangerous conditions in their home countries that many Dreamers came to the U.S. to escape. Furthermore, many of these young people have no recollection of, or connection with their country of origin. In August of 2019, APA’s Council of Representatives passed the 2019 Immigration and Refugee Policy Statement calling for more support for immigrants and refugees

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<sup>2</sup> Henderson, S. W., & Baily, C. D. Allen, B., Brabeck, K.

<sup>3</sup> Lustig, S. L., Kia-Keating, M., Knight, W. G., Geltman, P., Ellis, H., Kinzie, J. D., ... & Saxe, G. N. Review of child and adolescent refugee mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. (2004). 43(1), 24-36.

Silove, D., Steel, Z., & Watters, C. Policies of deterrence and the mental health of asylum seekers. *JAMA*. (2000). 284(5), 604-611.

<sup>4</sup> Dávila, S. (2019). Immigration Policy: A Psychological Perspective, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/immigration/fact-sheet.pdf>.

and encouraging psychologists to use their training to treat and advocate on behalf of immigrants, refugees and people seeking asylum in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dreamers' Current Experience**

Dreamers are unique in that they were brought to the United States at a young age. Research suggests that experiences of Dreamers are distinct from other immigrants and are associated with uncertainty about the future and a disconnect from their country of origin, as well as resiliency and educational attainment.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while much of the scientific research focuses on the negative aspects of the health and mental health of Dreamers due to their lack of permanent legal status, there is also evidence of their high level of engagement in society. This is related to self-confidence and social support within the immigration community.<sup>7</sup> If legislation is passed to support Dreamers, they can be expected to continue to contribute positively to society given their passion and desire to stay in the United States.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue. Please contact Serena Dávila, JD (sdavila@apa.org) in our Advocacy Office if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Katherine B. McGuire  
Chief Advocacy Officer

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<sup>5</sup>Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/about/governance/council/actions-summer-2019.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Méndez-Pounds, J., Nicholas, D.A., Gonzalez, N., & Whiting, J.B. I am just like everyone else, except for a nine-digit number: A Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of DREAMers. *The Qualitative Report*. (2018). 23(2), 442-455. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss2/12>.

<sup>7</sup> DeAngelo, L., Schuster, M.T., & Stebleton, M.J. California DREAMers: Activism, Identity, and Empowerment Among Undocumented College Students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. (2016). 9(3) 2016-230. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000023>.