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Testimony

By

**Arturo Vargas, Executive Director
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed
Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund**

Before

**The United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration Refugees and Border Security**

At the hearing entitled

**S. 952, Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors
(DREAM) Act of 2011**

**Washington, DC
June 28, 2011**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cornyn, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of S. 952, The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2011. We commend the Subcommittee on Immigration Refugees and Border Security for holding a hearing on this important piece of legislation.

The NALEO Educational Fund is the leading national non-profit organization that facilitates Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. The NALEO Educational Fund works on immigration through policy and advocacy at the local, state and federal level. For over 20 years, we have educated Latino newcomers about the importance of U.S. citizenship and provided assistance with the naturalization application process. Over the years, we have assisted more than 140,000 legal permanent residents take the important step to U.S. citizenship through community-based workshops and other services throughout the country. Our assistance efforts have been accompanied by a comprehensive national public service and media campaign to inform newcomers about the opportunities and requirements of U.S. citizenship. Our civic engagement initiative is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the naturalization process is accessible and affordable for the nation's legal permanent residents, many of whom are members of the Latino community.

The NALEO Educational Fund's constituency includes more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide, and our Board is comprised of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. School Board Members comprise the largest segment of our membership and they know firsthand the contributions that immigrant students are making to the economic vitality of our nation and the civic life of their communities. As a country we have invested in the elementary and secondary education of these students and we should allow them to become part of our economy and continue with their education.

Each year about 65,000 DREAM Act eligible students graduate from high school, only to realize that their hard work and academic achievement can go no further. These students have made stellar accomplishments in our education system, yet they cannot continue their achievements in college, the military, or trade schools. These missed opportunities hurt our youth and create a loss to America's workforce and society. The DREAM Act will ensure that motivated and accomplished students continue their journey toward becoming full Americans. Together with a broad and bipartisan coalition that includes the military, business, labor, faith-based and civic groups, we strongly support the DREAM Act.

The DREAM Act will help students whose undocumented status is no fault of their own. These youth were brought to the United States as children and have since grown up in our communities, stayed in school and consider the United States their home. In many cases, there is no other country they can call home. It is unfortunate that some of the nation's best and brightest students face a bleak future because their immigration status prevents them from pursuing educational, employment or military opportunities. Passing the DREAM will provide deserved opportunities for thousands of young people so that they can contribute to the growth and prosperity of the nation that they call home.

The DREAM Act will strengthen our economy and society by enabling thousands of students to pursue opportunities in college, the military or trade schools. Through their hard work and achievements, these youth are eager to help the United States address its unprecedented economic challenges. The economic contributions of DREAM Act eligible students will benefit our economy through a larger tax base resulting from a better educated and more productive population. This will help the United States to better compete in the global economy since those individuals that will benefit from the DREAM Act are precisely the individuals that we want in our country—they

include honor roll students, star athletes, talented artists, and aspiring engineers, doctors and entrepreneurs. This act will help hardworking and skilled youth take the next steps in their path to professional and civic development. These students, already part of our community, will be able to contribute to the economic vitality of the nation.

The DREAM Act will also promote our national security by expanding the opportunity to serve in the military to hundreds of thousands of high-quality people, allowing the United States to obtain much needed translation and cultural expertise in our armed forces. With a change in our immigration laws, we could add thousands of talented, motivated, multilingual and multicultural people into our military and workforce.

While the DREAM Act will not solve all of our immigration issues, everyone should be able to agree that creating opportunities for the next generation of leaders in this country is something we can and should do now. At the state level there is growing national consensus in support of the DREAM Act, as several states have recently passed state-based versions of the legislation. States have recognized that the DREAM Act would help break the cycle of underemployment, instability, and poverty endured by undocumented immigrants. It would also reward good behavior by young people who, despite their circumstances, have worked hard and remained in school. Without the DREAM Act, these children will be condemned to live in the shadows of the country they love, surviving in an underground economy where they will be exploited and abused and where their gifts and talents will be lost to our communities – to our country's future.

The DREAM Act has wide bipartisan support and is a legislative priority for the Latino electorate. Passage of the DREAM Act will help strengthen our military, meet educational goals for our nation and provide a firm but fair way to address the immigration situation of children brought to the

United States at a young age so that the nation can dedicate their enforcement resources to those who pose a threat to our country. There is no reason why it should not receive that same kind of bipartisan support today that it has received in the past. The NALEO Educational Fund urges passage of the DREAM Act. Thank you for your consideration of our views.