

White House Turns to Religious Leaders for DREAM Act Support

✖ The White House is calling on religious leaders to help make the DREAM Act a reality. The White House hosted a call on Thursday morning with rabbis, pastors and Christian leaders who hope to convince at least 60 United States senators to pass the bipartisan legislation before Congress takes its holiday break.

The DREAM Act is legislation that would give students who grew up in the U.S. a chance to contribute to the nation's well-being by serving in the U.S. armed forces or pursuing a higher education. The limited, targeted legislation would allow only the best and brightest young people to earn their legal status after a rigorous and lengthy process. It applies to those brought to the United States as minors through no fault of their own by their parents.

"This is a critical moment for the government, for our educational and military institutions, for the faith community, and most importantly for the young people all across our great nation," says Joshua Dubois, director of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. "Through the DREAM Act we are on the verge of bringing a greater degree of rationality and compassion to our nation's immigration system and at the same time improving our economy as well."

On the call were Rabbi Jack Moline from Congregation Agudas Achim in Alexandria, Va.; Joel C. Hunter, pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed in Longwood, Fla.; pastor Rich Nathan from Vineyard Columbus in Columbus, Ohio; and Noel Castellanos from the Christian Community Development Association in

Chicago. All these men support the DREAM Act.

Moline says many of the kids at schools in his Alexandria community epitomize what the Bible calls a resident stranger an individual who is already with but not of you. He says the Torah instructs Jews to welcome strangers and make them members of their home.

"I don't suggest for a moment that the laws of this land should be determined by the Bible or any religious text. That's Congress' job. But the values that our senators and representatives rely on to decide what good law is must come from somewhere," Moline says. "What I would offer as the Jewish contribution to this deliberation about the DREAM Act is the notion that we have a special responsibility to these young people who wish no longer to be resident strangers, but to take their place among us with shared values and practices."

In terms of the larger immigration reform picture, Hunter says helping youth by passing the DREAM Act is the easiest and most sensible part of the challenge to address. As he sees it, it's morally wrong to punish kids for something their parents did. The voice of any religion, he says, is to transfer people from the wrong path to the right one.

"These are talented young people who grew up with Americans and want to give back to the nation they call home. They are willing to put their lives on the line for the country they love," Hunter says. "This is not amnesty. Amnesty comes at no cost. There's a high cost and a very strict guideline to the completion of these requirements."