Currently there are 1.5 million foreign-born youth living in the U.S. without legal documentation. These youth have grown up in neighborhoods across the U.S. and attended U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Many of them even graduate from high school with honors. Due to their legal status as undocumented immigrants, however, they do not have easy access to higher education. (See American in Name, below.)

Many states prohibit undocumented students from attending college or university. Other states force them to pay out-of-state tuition even when they meet and exceed all the requirements for in-state tuition. They cannot vote, drive, or work. In addition, in the present hostile climate toward immigration, they most often live in constant fear of apprehension by authorities and deportation.

These youth may be your peers who sat next to you in class or the cafeteria from elementary through high school. They may have attended the same church you did. Today is a great opportunity for you to stand in solidarity with all undocumented youth and advocate for the Dream Act!

The “Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act,” known as the DREAM ACT, is a piece of bipartisan legislation introduced March 26, 2009, at the federal level in both the House (H.R. 1751) and the Senate (S. 729). This bill allows undocumented children and young adults who entered the U.S. when 16 or younger and who have lived in the U.S. for five years to apply for conditional permanent residency if they maintain good moral character and earn a high school diploma. After six years of conditional permanent residency, they could apply for lawful permanent residency (LPR). By allowing students to apply for conditional permanent residency, we give them a path to higher education, lawful employment, and service to the U.S.

American in Name* by Unnamed Student

Like most Americans, I love my country, and I do whatever it asks of me. Every year, like most Americans, I contribute thousands of dollars to programs like Social Security and Medicare. At the end of the year, like most Americans, I file state and federal income taxes. And as soon as I could, I signed up for the Selective Service.

Unlike most Americans, I am an undocumented immigrant. This means that I will never be eligible for Social Security, Medicare or hundreds of other government services. I file my taxes not with a Social Security number, but with an individual tax identification number which is a special number assigned to undocumented immigrants by the I.R.S. so we can pay taxes. And while I can never serve in the military, the selective brochure tells me that yes, even undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are required to enroll. I don’t mind doing these things. I consider them American to do so.

I’ve lived in the U.S. since I was two years old. I was educated in the American school system, embraced American culture as my own, and came to call this country home. I speak English better than I do Spanish.

But America is not where I was born. Officially, I am considered a Mexican national living in the U.S. without papers or documentation. My only country of citizenship is Mexico. Ironic, considering I don’t even remember Mexico. I have no friends or closely connected family in Mexico; everyone I know is here. My entire life is here.

Despite not being able to legally work, drive, or vote, I have succeeded throughout my life. During high school, I was president of the National Honor Society, scored admirably on the SAT, and graduated valedictorian of my class.

I was accepted at both the University of Arizona and Arizona State University with full tuition scholarships. Stanford also accepted me; but, because I was not a citizen, I was not eligible for any federal aid and therefore could not attend. So I stayed in Arizona.

College was rough. In 2006, Arizona voters prohibited state universities from providing scholarships to undocumented students. I don’t resent Arizona voters, they are simply misinformed. If they knew who we were and what we did to get to where we are today, I strongly believe that they would be much more sympathetic to our cause. Eventually, through the grace of a wide variety of private individuals and organizations, many of us were able to graduate.

I decided on law school shortly before my graduation. I didn’t know if undocumented students could even attend law school or practice, so I applied everywhere in the hopes that I would be accepted somewhere, anywhere. Two days ago, I received an acceptance letter from a tier 1 law school and with it a full tuition scholarship. They were impressed with my academics, LSAT, and most of all my personal statement which talked about the challenges I overcame as an immigrant student. I am now working toward becoming an immigration and civil rights lawyer in the U.S. I’m doing this to help myself, my community, and my country. I want to insure that the justice and equality promised by the constitution are readily available to all.

If the last 20 years have taught me anything, it is that undocumented students are the very concept of the pursuit of life and liberty. We represent what makes this country great. And like most Americans, we love our country, and are willing to do whatever it asks of us.

*This story, provided by Texas Dream Act Coalition, is the personal story of an unidentified and undocumented student.

The DREAM Act is the only hope for over 1.2 million students who want nothing more than to obtain residency and give back to the only country they know and love. We invite you to take action and help make this dream come true.

You can e-mail your representative at: http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/alert/?alertid=13182316&type=CO
And your senators at: http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/alert/?alertid=13182421&type=CO

For more information on the Dream Act and ideas on how you can stand in solidarity and advocate for the passage of the Dream Act, visit http://www.txdreamactalliance.com