



Dream Act / DACA

Ever since the Senate failed in February to pass any of three alternative bills that would have established a path to citizenship for approximately 1.8 million “Dreamers”—undocumented individuals who were brought to this country at a young age—prospects for any further legislative action in the near term have been bleak. Congress had already passed the FY 2018 funding legislation that Senate Democrats briefly used as leverage on the issue, forcing a short-lived government shutdown over the lack of a permanent legislative fix for the Dreamers. And multiple federal courts had ordered the Trump administration to resume taking applications from Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients whose two-year reprieves from deportation were expiring, thereby taking some of the heat off Congress to act.

But behind the scenes, discussions that had continued about a path forward have now crystallized into a movement led by moderate House Republicans to force a floor vote on legislation to protect the Dreamers. Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA) has sponsored a rule (H. Res 774) that would bring four immigration bills to the floor under the rarely-invoked “Queen of the Hill” procedure. Under this procedure, the bill that gets the most votes out of the four (as long as it receives a majority of votes) passes the House. Under the rule, the following four bills would be voted on: (1) the so-called “clean” Dream Act sponsored by Rep. Roybal-Allard (D-CA); (2) bipartisan compromise legislation spearheaded by Reps. Hurd (R-TX) and Aguilar (D-CA); (3) the House conservatives’ preferred bill sponsored by Rep. Goodlatte (R-VA); and (4) a fourth, yet-to-be developed alternative bill by House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI).

As Congress returned from its Memorial Day recess, H. Res. 774 had 244 cosponsors, a majority of the House of Representatives, yet the House Rules Committee has not considered it because House leadership is opposed. In light of this situation, Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-FL) has filed a “discharge petition” that, if signed by a majority of House members (218), would bring the rule to the House floor in spite of leadership’s opposition. So far, 215 members of Congress have signed the petition, including 23 Republicans and 192 Democrats. The petition is likely to garner the three additional signatures it needs in the coming days (possibly by the time Advocates in Action begins). Should that happen, the rule could come to the House floor on June 25.

The expected success of the discharge petition has House leadership scrambling to craft a bill that could pass with the support of 218 Republicans, but that will not be easy. Though there are numerous House Republicans who have publicly supported the Denham/Curbelo movement, the most conservative House members adamantly oppose “amnesty” for Dreamers and have demanded a separate vote on the Goodlatte bill, which does not establish a path to citizenship for Dreamers. Instead, it would temporarily extend the DACA program for current recipients. The bill also has numerous other provisions to cut down on illegal and legal immigration alike. Recently, House conservatives sunk the farm bill not because they objected to that legislation, but because they were upset that the Goodlatte bill had not been brought up for a vote. House leadership hopes to somehow bridge this divide and bring a Republican-backed bill up for a vote before June 25.

AACC has supported legislation to provide Dreamers with a path to citizenship since the Dream Act was first introduced in 2001. Advocates in Action attendees, depending on the discharge petition's status at the time of the meeting (or convening), should urge their Congressional delegation to support bringing the Dream legislation up for a vote on the House floor. Should that occur, community colleges support "Yes" votes on two of the bills—the bills sponsored by Rep. Roybal-Allard and Reps. Hurd and Aguilar. Community colleges should advocate for their Senators to support either of these bills, should one be passed in the House.