

# The path to citizenship

## Nonprofits advocate for a clean DREAM Act

By Caroline Bowyer  
The Durham VOICE

El Centro Hispano, in coordination with El Pueblo in Raleigh, North Carolina, held a rally outside of Sen. Thom Tillis' Raleigh office on Tuesday, Jan. 23. The nonprofit organizations gathered in support of a clean DREAM Act.

According to its website, El Centro Hispano is a nonprofit organization in Durham, North Carolina, that “works to strengthen community, build bridges and advocate for equity and inclusion of Hispanics/Latinos in the Triangle Area of North Carolina.”

As of 2017, approximately 800,000 unauthorized youth immigrants have received work and protection through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, according to the Pew Research Center.

Eliazar Posada, El Centro Hispano's community engagement and advocacy manager, said a clean DREAM Act is a bill that would provide a path to citizenship for all DACA recipients without harming the immigrant community. To Posada, that means “no money for the border wall, no increased measures that will continue to attack the immigrant community and no increase in programs that will attempt to deport more people.”

Bridgette Richards, an immigration attorney at El Centro Hispano, said DACA recipients shouldn't have to wait for the bill to pass.

“We should make these people citizens now,” she said. “And I think that is what people are trying to show, that there is support for finding a legislation that will give DACA recipients a legitimate place in society.”

However, Richards emphasized that bringing back DACA is not the ultimate goal.

“The endgame is really trying to find a way that the person who has DACA can fully participate in society, and that would be making them have a pathway to citizenship,” she said.

Eighteen-year-old Viviana Mateo has been a DACA recipient since she was 15. She said rallying outside Tillis' office shows that people are no longer afraid to stand up for what they believe in.

“We are out here showing unity in our



**Eliazar Posada, El Centro Hispano's community engagement and advocacy manager, helps the immigrant community by raising awareness about the need for a bill allowing a path to citizenship. (Photo by Caroline Bowyer)**

community and how an injustice to one of us is an injustice to us all,” she said. “Now, more than ever, our community has come together and is strong and ready to make change. We are no longer staying silent. We are speaking up and finding the power in our stories and educating people on the issues.”

Mateo said nonprofit organizations have helped keep her up to date with DACA and a clean DREAM Act.

“They educate me on more issues than just DACA and have opportunities for me to get directly involved with making change happen,” she said.

El Centro Hispano holds several different events throughout the year. The organization partners with other organizations like Tuesdays with Tillis to organize advocacy events to raise awareness. They also have clinics for DACA renewals.

*“An injustice to one of us is an injustice to us all.”*

**Viviana Mateo, DACA Recipient**

On Feb. 24, El Centro Hispano will hold a Know Your Rights Clinic. Richards said the clinic will teach people things like knowing your rights when dealing with law enforcement.

Mateo said voting is crucial in helping Durham community members.

“You have and can use [voting] to make a difference by the people you elect,” she said. “Voting is a privilege that, unfortunately, not all of us have so definitely take advantage of it and use it to help.”

Posada said Durham community members can show their support by learning the struggles that DACA recipients — often referred to as “Dreamers” — go through. Additionally, they can sponsor a DACA renewal, which costs about \$500.

“All of the ... Dreamers have been in this country for the majority of their lives and know this country as home,” he said. “They contribute to society, and the Durham community can call our representatives and senators to apply some pressure so they know we need a solution to this.”