



The Border Dreamers go to Congress

Reflections on the Border Dreamer Alliance Delegation
to Washington D.C.
October 24th-26th 2017

About the Border Dreamers Alliance: The Border Dreamers Alliance is a project of the Border Network for Human Rights. The BDA aims to develop border dreamers and youth as community leaders and advocate for inclusive immigration policies that advance the dignity and rights of all persons.

About the Border Network for Human Rights: The Border Network for Human Rights, founded in 1998, is one of the leading human rights advocacy and immigration reform organizations located at the U.S./Mexico Border. BNHR has over 7,000 members in West Texas and Southern New Mexico.

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Picture 1—BDA Delegation in Front of the U.S. Capitol—October 26th, 2017

On September 5th, President Trump announced an end to DACA—the Obama-era executive order that has allowed hundreds of thousands of previously undocumented immigrant youth to work, learn, and live here in the U.S. in some semblance of peace. This announcement made clear that many in American society did not understand the lives, dreams, and contributions of these immigrant youth. The discussions that followed offering to secure the place of Dreamers in America by putting more money and resources toward ‘border security’ also made clear that many, across the political spectrum, do not know the lives and realities of border communities. Living and working in the U.S.-Mexico borderland, we knew that we needed to combat these misunderstandings and make sure that policy makers are educated and reality-based.

Here at Border Network for Human Rights, doing that meant turning to our youth and empowering them to be the messengers we needed. This meant cultivating youth who reflected on what the end of DACA meant in their lives, and who had the courage to take those stories, in person, to lawmakers in Washington D.C. It meant getting dozens of youth ages 13-



Picture 2—BDA Members Train to Visit Washington D.C.

35 comfortable that they were the leaders their families, their communities, and they themselves were looking for. It meant weeks of work—training, outreach, setting up meetings, rehearsing, writing, and learning—all on a tight timeline to ensure our relevance to conversations in Congress and across America.

We chose to be aggressive. These stories had to be told. These dreams had to be shared. And the clock was always ticking. So we created the Border Dreamers Alliance (BDA).

Key Facts about the BDA Delegation to Congress:

—Participants—

51 total participants
 30 DACA recipients 10 Youth Under 18
 Participants from El Paso, Las Cruces, Rio Grande Valley, Albuquerque, and San Antonio

—Meetings and Packet Drops—

<u>68 Representatives</u>		<u>35 Senators</u>	
22	46	16	19

Democratic Republican Democratic Republican

- We targeted offices of leadership, relevant committees (Judiciary and Homeland Security), elected officials from the border, and key moderates in both chambers.
- In cases where we were unable to schedule a meeting with an office, we instructed our teams to drop an educational packet and tell their stories—usually leading to a de-facto meeting.

We assembled a group of 50 dreamers to educate Congress. They met with attorneys to ensure their participation would not expose anyone to undue risk. We reached out to more than 100 offices, House and Senate, Republicans and Democrats—each of whom would be educated by one of ten Dreamer-led teams we formed from our delegation. We had our youth meet with local elected officials to get tips on educating a lawmaker or their staff. We fundraised the money to fly this group to Washington. We owe particular thanks to the generous support of the Libra Foundation—their help made this trip possible. We worked for weeks, because the lives of these youths and their communities depended on their ability to educate Congress on their

stories and their experiences.

On October 24th, 46 dreamers from West Texas and Southern New Mexico flew out of the El Paso airport. When we landed in D.C. five more Dreamers from the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas joined our group. That night, we divided out the packets for meetings, each of which contained more than twenty personal



Picture 3--BDA Members Take a Photo with Cong. Beto O'Rourke After a DACA Roundtable



Picture 4—A BDA Member Gets a Photo After Meeting with House Min. Leader Nancy Pelosi to Discuss DACA

testimonies from border Dreamers, and made our final preparations. On the morning of October 25th, and again on the 26th, we took Capitol Hill. Our delegation, broken into ten teams, took 50 scheduled meetings, and dropped an additional 53 packets—contacts that typically became a de-facto meeting. We talked to more than one-fifth of Congress, including more than a third of the U.S. Senate. We had a roundtable, live-streamed online and open to press, with Cong. O'Rourke where our Dreamers shared their stories and experiences with the world.

In each meeting, these border youth worked to tell their stories as Dreamers, as border residents, as Americans. We worked hard—nobody harder than those youth—to ensure Congress knew their dreams, their trials and tribulations, their dedication to the country where they were raised. We also worked to ensure Congress knew their commitment to their families and communities that would be torn asunder by more bad policy choices made in D.C. We were there to be heard, and we made sure Congress listened and learned.



Picture 5—BDA Members Take a Photo With Cong. William Lacy Clay After a Congressional Progressive Caucus Meeting About DACA

The trip was a fantastic success. Never before had there been of border residents going to educate Congress on the realities of their lives as large as ours—but we made it happen without a hitch. We worked with youth, many who had never met a legislator before, some still in high school and middle school, and made them realize that they are the leaders we need. We hope that we will not have to go back to Washington D.C. anytime soon, but we are confident that with the experience they gained on this trip, these youth are up for those future challenges.

Most of all, we are confident we made an impact in the hearts and minds of Congress. We worked hard to educate Congress, not just with facts, but with the basic values and humanity of border residents and immigrant communities. At our roundtable, Congressman O'Rourke commented on how many of his colleagues spoke to him about meeting with our delegation—and how impressed they were by the stories, dreams, and humanity they heard. There is more work to do, for sure—we can never stop telling our stories and working to educate our government. This delegation is a reminder of the power that ordinary people and communities have embodied in their stories and their persons; it is a reminder that their outreach and education, their humanity and compassion make a real difference in the course of our country.



Picture 6—A BDA Team Meets with Cong. Zoe Lofgren about DACA



Picture 7—A Dreamer Walks the Halls of Congress Between Meetings as Part of the BDA October 2017 Delegation