

# Patriotic Americans Say: “Let Us Serve”

Statement of Unity Between LGBT and Immigrant Americans  
[GetEQUAL](#), [United We Dream](#), [Presente.org](#), and [Immigration Equality Action Fund](#)

Passage of the DREAM Act and repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” are bipartisan measures which enjoy the support of a majority of Americans. Both make economic sense and both would right a moral wrong in America.

The grassroots movements advocating for both the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” and passage of the DREAM Act call on our Senators to support these measures and to stand up to politicians who push talented gay and immigrant Americans into the shadows in order to loudly rile up an angry minority.

Gay, lesbian, and immigrant service members have fought and died throughout our country’s history so that every human being in the United States could be free. It is in their honor that we fight a shared injustice, motivating us all to join hands and fight together. We are actively healing past differences and are determined to overcome every obstacle that stands between us and our full humanity.

When a woman serving her country in Afghanistan sees her life and career destroyed because she is lesbian, or a man who has risen through the ranks decides not to re-enlist because of homophobic policies, all of us suffer.

When an immigrant youth who has grown up in America -- who graduates from high school and considers himself to be an American in every way -- has to live in fear of deportation instead of being allowed to pursue his dreams in the military or the classroom, all of America pays the price.

Both passage of the DREAM Act and repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” are absolutely necessary to restore the basic principles of justice and liberty which have defined America since our founding. And both are significant down payments on the struggles for equal justice under the law for the immigrant and LGBT communities in America.

Our lives have been tossed around like political footballs for too long, and we will not accept the cowardice of political leaders who hide behind complaints about “process” or false claims that justice for some is a substitute for justice for all. Our futures are sewn together and equality can only be obtained when all of us can feel the warmth of freedom.

**GET=QUAL.**



**presente.org**

**IMMIGRATION EQUALITY ACTION FUND**

## **IT IS FOR THESE PATRIOTS AND THE THOUSANDS LIKE THEM THAT WE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE:**

**Felipe Matos** came to the United States from Brazil at the age of 14. In high school, he joined the NJROTC because he wanted to join the Navy and serve the country he loves and calls home. Even though he earned one of the highest scores in the military aptitude test and many recruiters called him for two years, he was not able to serve. Felipe went on to Miami Dade College, where he is studying business administration, was elected president of the student government, and has served as the student representative on the Miami Dade College Board of Trustees. "I identify myself as queer and I have a partner who I love dearly. I need passage of the DREAM Act and repeal of 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' for me to be able to serve in the Navy without fear and out of the shadows."

**Lt. Dan Choi** graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and is fluent in Arabic. He served as an infantry officer with the United States Army in Iraq and later served in the National Guard. Lt. Choi served for a decade under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," a policy that is completely antithetical to the values he learned at West Point. Deception and lies poison a unit and cripple a fighting force. He served his country with honor, yet was discharged from the military in the summer of 2010, one year after publicly announcing that he was gay.

**Cesar Vargas** grew up in Brooklyn, graduated from high school and then college. Now, he's in his third year in law school and dreams of serving as a JAG officer or on the front line as an intelligence officer to lead Marines. Cesar considers himself an American in all but paperwork, but cannot serve the country he loves because he lacks immigration papers.

**Corporal Evelyn Thomas**, born in Los Angeles and raised in Texas, joined the Army National Guard and then the U.S. Marine Corps. She served at Camp Pendleton for four years until another Marine found a letter in her locker about her relationship with a woman. She was honorably discharged in 1991. In October 2009, Thomas founded a ministry for gays in the military who fear they may be discharged for speaking openly to base chaplains about their sexuality. The Sanctuary Project Veterans is a ministry of Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Carlsbad, CA, and it provides a safe haven, support, legal advice, and services for soldiers harassed due to the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy.

**Nelly** came to the U.S. at nine years old with her parents, who wanted to provide her with a better life. She went on to graduate from high school with a 4.0 GPA, was elected class president, and even served as Cadet Commander of her high school's ROTC program -- all while holding a job to support her family. "I took the military entrance exam and got very high scores. I was set to get a good job in the army," Nelly said, "but when it came time to submit my documentation, I couldn't go any further."

**Petty Officer Autumn Sandeen** joined the United States Navy in 1980 as a Fire Controlman. She served on two Guided Missile Fast Frigates as a Mark 92 Fire Control System technician, and one Guided Missile Fast Frigate as a Mark 15 Close-In Weapons System technician. She retired after 20 years as a Fire Controlman First Class. At the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, Sandeen was sexually harassed by a subordinate and Executive Officer for being perceived as an effeminate gay male. After retiring from the U.S. Navy, she was awarded a Veteran's Administration Service Connected Disability rating. She began transitioning as a male-to-female transsexual on February 6, 2003, and has worked with many transgender advocacy organizations.

**Gaby Pacheco** was brought to this country from Ecuador at age 7. In 2006, immigration agents raided her family home, and they have been fighting deportation since. Gaby was the highest ranked Junior ROTC student in her high school and scored highest on the military's vocational aptitude test. The Air Force tried to recruit her, but her immigration status prevented her from serving. With a military career not possible, Gaby went on to earn two associate's degrees and served as president of both the student government and the statewide community college student association. Gaby is currently working on her bachelor's degree in special education.