

# **Sen. Durbin Meets With DACA Students from Loyola Chicago**

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Ranking Member of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, today met with Cesar Montelongo and Fernanda Herrera Vera, who have temporary protection from deportation under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Cesar and Fernanda are students enrolled in the MD-PhD program at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine and the Loyola University School of Law, respectively. Cesar was Durbin's guest at last year's State of the Union address. Earlier today, Durbin, Cesar, and Fernanda attended the oral arguments in the Supreme Court on DACA.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Cesar and Fernanda today after listening to oral arguments in the DACA case before the Supreme Court," Durbin said. "These students are just two of the many brave and determined Dreamers who want nothing more than to

stay in the only country they know as home. Will America be a stronger country if we deport people like Cesar and Fernanda, or if they stay here and contribute to the communities they call home? The answer is clear.”

In April 2010, Durbin and then-Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) were the first members of Congress to call for the establishment of DACA. Durbin first introduced the Dream Act nineteen years ago. In March, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Durbin introduced the Dream Act of 2019. The Dream Act was also included in the 2013 comprehensive immigration reform bill that Durbin and Graham coauthored as part of the “Gang of Eight” – four Democrats and four Republicans. The 2013 bill passed the Senate on a strong bipartisan vote of 68-32, but the Republican leadership of the House of Representatives refused to consider it.

A photo of Senator Durbin’s meeting with Cesar and Fernanda is available [here](#).

### **Cesar Montelongo**

Cesar Montelongo was ten years old when his family came to the United States from Mexico. He grew up in New Mexico, where his academic prowess was quickly apparent. Cesar graduated high school with a Grade Point Average above 4.0, and he was ranked third in his class. Cesar went on to New Mexico State University, where he was a triple major in biology, microbiology, and Spanish with minors in chemistry and biochemistry. Cesar graduated with distinction in the honors track with a 3.9 GPA. Cesar then earned a Master’s degree in biology, with a minor in molecular biology, while also working as a teaching assistant. Today, Cesar is the first DACA student enrolled in the MD-PhD program at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. Upon completion of this highly competitive program, he will receive a medical degree and a doctorate in science.

In 2017, Durbin told Cesar’s story on the Senate floor.

### **Fernanda Herrera Vera**

When Fernanda was two years old, her family came to the United States from Mexico. When Fernanda was seven, her family was forced to leave Guntersville, Alabama, when her father lost his job due to his immigration status. The family settled in Gadsden, Alabama, where Fernanda attended a private Catholic school on scholarship. When Fernanda was 10, her parents opened a restaurant. Every day after school, she went to the restaurant to wait tables and help run the restaurant, doing her homework in spare time.

During Fernanda's junior year of high school, Alabama passed the harshest anti-immigrant law in the country, which forced the family restaurant to shut down. Alabama barred Dreamers from attending public colleges, but thanks to DACA, Fernanda was able to attend a private school, Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Her parents worked hard to pay her tuition - her father worked 80 hours a week at a chicken plant. Fernanda graduated Samford in 2017 and her experiences drove her to become an immigration activist, working at the Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice. Last year, Fernanda entered the Loyola University Chicago School of Law. This spring her mother was pulled over in Georgia for driving with a busted taillight. Her mother is now in deportation proceedings. Fernanda's dream is to be an immigration lawyer so she can help people like her mother.