December 8, 2003

Honorable Bill Frist
United States Senate
461 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senate Majority Leader Frist,

I write to urge your support for The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act pending in the Senate, known as the DREAM Act, and for its companion bill, the Student Adjustment Act, pending in the House of Representatives. I write also to express my hope that the final version of the law will maintain the right of DREAM Act beneficiaries to federal financial aid grants, including Pell grants, which was removed from the DREAM Act by the Feinstein-Grassley Amendment.

The principles behind the DREAM Act are as true as they were when I wrote to the Senate in support of the Act over a year ago. Then, I emphasized the important contributions to our society and the dramatic impact the proposed legislation will have on New York’s communities and economy. With the economy beginning to recover, the need for talented college-trained workers is more important than ever. Students who gain access to higher education give back to New York City as workers and taxpayers; many of our hardest-working and most successful citizens are immigrants.

It is for that reason that the Feinstein-Grassley Amendment is so problematic. The City University of New York is the largest public urban university in the country, with over 208,000 students speaking 120 languages. Almost half of CUNY’s students are immigrants from over 160 countries, and nearly 60 percent of the student body comes from families that earn less than $30,000 annually. At The City University of New York, Pell Grants are an essential source of tuition and other educational funds for our financially disadvantaged students, who face even greater challenges than most to complete school. This is the case at many state universities. Without Pell Grants, many of the newly legalized immigrant beneficiaries of the DREAM Act will be denied access to higher education.

Similarly, I strongly support the repeal of federal laws that require that many undocumented students pay a higher nonresident tuition rate at state schools. Barring these students from in-state tuition eligibility has forced public colleges and universities to charge them much higher tuition rates. For many, out-of-state tuition is prohibitively expensive, making attendance at their own community’s schools impossible. Many dedicated, highly regarded students have been forced to drop out of college. By allowing such students access to resident tuition, we can assure them equal opportunity with their peers. This is very much consistent with New York State legislation initiated and approved by Governor George A. Pataki and the New York State Legislature.
I urge you to support the legislation on permanent residence for high school and college students, such as the DREAM Act and Student Adjustment Act, and the restoration of federal aid to those students. Generations of Americans to come will remember your leadership in education, and thank you for it. I very much appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Goldstein

cc: Senator Orrin Hatch
    Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Louise Mirrer
    Secretary of the Board of Trustees and
    Vice Chancellor for University Relations Jay Hershenson
    College Presidents