

Religious leaders join White House in Dream Act push

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Religious leaders joined White House officials Thursday (Dec. 16) in urging the Senate to pass the DREAM Act, calling it a moral solution to help students hurt by the country's immigration system.

The legislation, which would permit young illegal immigrants to gain citizenship through a college education or military service, passed the House on Dec. 8. Advocates are pressing the Senate to take up the measure before the end of the lame-duck session this year.

"We have a special responsibility to these young people who wish no longer to be resident strangers but to take their place among us," said Rabbi Jack Moline, public policy director for the Rabbinical Assembly, on a conference call organized by the White House.

Florida megachurch pastor Joel Hunter called the act a "practical as well as a moral move" that doesn't give students amnesty, requiring them instead to follow strict rules to gain citizenship.

Several leaders said young immigrants should not be punished for the actions of their parents, who brought them to the U.S. illegally.

"Through the DREAM Act, we're on the verge of bringing a greater

degree of rationality and compassion to our nation's immigration system and at the same time improving our economy as well," said Joshua DuBois, executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The conference call came two days after dozens of faith leaders and students gathered on Capitol Hill for an "emergency prayer summit" to urge senators to pass the legislation.