

FUTURE OF DACA REMAINS UNCERTAIN AS TEXAS-LED CHALLENGE PASSES ON

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Spectrum News 1
June 17, 2022

WASHINGTON — It has been 10 years since then President Barack Obama established a program to protect immigrants who came to this country as children. Known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, the program has allowed more than 600,000 young immigrants to live, work and study in the U.S. without fear of deportation. But without congressional action, the program's future and the future of DACA recipients is unclear.

What You Need To Know

- The DACA program is celebrating its 10th anniversary this week
- There is a Texas-led challenge to DACA currently making its way through the courts
- A federal judge in Texas last year ruled the Obama administration did not have the authority to create DACA. The State of Texas also argues it is financially burdened by the program
- However, supporters say DACA recipients help the economy

After graduating from the University of North Texas at Dallas two years ago, Gloria Rinconi plans to pursue her master's degree in clinical mental health at the university this fall. She hopes to one day go to medical school and become a psychiatrist. These are opportunities, she said, are possible in part because of DACA.

Rinconi was born in Mexico and was brought to the U.S. when she was one-year-old. She said growing up, she knew her legal status differed from her peers because her parents did not shy away and encouraged her to work hard because the U.S. was the "land of opportunity."

"(DACA) means to be able to fulfill many of the traditional American college student roles and the traditional milestones of being able to graduate college, being able to obtain a driver's license, being able to apply to a job, internships and continue life as a normal 24-year-old," Rinconi said.

Wednesday marked the 10-year anniversary of DACA, which Obama created over the objections of Republicans in Congress.

Thirty-three-year-old Sandra Avalos of Dallas said 10 years later, she and other DACA recipients are living with uncertainty because there is no guarantee the program will remain. Avalos said she was brought to the country when she was seven years old and said the U.S. is really the only home she knows. She also graduated from UNT Dallas and started a family. Avalos now works with high school students from first-generation and low-income households in North Texas through a college readiness program.

She and Rinconi were back in Washington to call on Congress to establish a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients.

"That peace of mind is important. It's important for our mental health, it's important so that we can support our families and for some even to contribute to the society that we live in," Avalos said. "That uncertainty is definitely something that affects us daily. And so that's why having a path to citizenship will alleviate that, right? Also, having a path to citizenship will give us the opportunity to not worry who's our president at the time."

In 2020, the Supreme Court overturned President Donald Trump's termination of DACA. The Trump administration argued the program is illegal.

Democrats in Washington celebrated the anniversary with DACA recipients, also known as Dreamers, but said it is not enough.

"I regret that this is the anniversary of DACA and not the anniversary of a full path to citizenship for Dreamer[s] and also for their parents and family members in a more comprehensive bill," said Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-San Antonio.

"The biggest barrier has been Republican opposition to creating a path to citizenship, and also during the Trump years, immigrants and immigration became the number one boogeyman and scapegoat," Castro later told Spectrum News. "I think that made it very hard for Republicans really to negotiate."

Avalos and Rinconi said they met with Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, during their visit. The Republican supports targeted legislation that would offer permanent legal status to certain DACA recipients. Cornyn and Sen. Thom Tillis, R-North Carolina, last year sent a letter to the chair



of the Senate Judiciary Committee urging him to consider a bill related to this narrow provision. But Rinconi believes it should go beyond active participants.

“As a person that loves Texas, as [someone] that calls Texas home, that cannot imagine my life outside of Texas, that action is needed now. I cannot live in increments, I cannot live holding my breath for the next renewal. I cannot live for the next moment when DACA is attacked,” Rinconi said. “As much as I feel American, as much as I feel like this is my home, I’m constantly denied to pursue my life further than every two-year renewal period.”

There is a Texas-led challenge to DACA currently making its ways through the courts. A federal judge in Texas last year ruled the Obama administration did not have the authority to create DACA. The State of Texas also argues it is financially burdened by the program. The case is up before the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in July.

While the state argues the program is costly for Texas, Justin Yancy, the president of the Texas Business Leadership Council, said that could not be further from the truth.

“Ninety-six percent of Dreamers in Texas are either working or in school,” Yancy said. “[They] came here at a young age, at no fault of their own, and are all earning an education, supporting local businesses and participating in the American economy.”

He added that supporting DACA recipients would help address the labor shortage across the country.

“To lose an entire group of people who are skilled, there’s never a good time for that. From an economic perspective, we need Dreamers in Texas to add value to the economy,” Yancy said.

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