

# Defending DACA: Why the Program Must Be Preserved

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Abstract— This brief provides a comprehensive overview of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the risks it currently faces. It examines the program's importance, discusses the contributions of DACA recipients to American society, and analyzes the legislative challenges that threaten the program's future. The paper proposes potential solutions, to ensure the presence of the program for years to come. These solutions include the publication of a Department of Justice memorandum to clarify that DACA does not infringe upon state rights and the development of educational programs to establish open-mindedness throughout the states. These strategies aim to strengthen DACA's legal standing and ensure the continued protection of Dreamers in America.

Keywords— Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, Recipients, Dreamers, Instability, Immigrants, Authorization, Deportation

# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The legality of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is currently being challenged by a group of Republican-led states, with Texas leading the effort. This is a cause for concern, as DACA, which is no longer not accepting new applicants, provides essential benefits to immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children, allowing them to live out the American Dream.

#### II. Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, also known as DACA is a US immigration policy that protects undocumented immigrants, who came into America as children, from deportation. The program gives the immigrants protection from deportation, and a work permit, allowing them to live their lives as normal American citizens would. However, due to ever-changing policies, DACA is unstable, and does not provide the same level of protection to American Dreamers as it did years ago. Because of this, more and more Dreamers, who are integral to American society, are leaving America, disheartened by years of instability. Additionally, DACA faces risks of abolishment, which, if it occurs, will alter the immigration system of America for years to come.

#### A. Pointed Summary

- The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program is unstable, due to changes in policies that have occurred over the past two decades.
- The Dreamers (DACA recipients) are beginning to leave the country.
- Nearly half of the Dreamers work in industries with genuine <u>labor shortages</u>.
- It is of utmost importance to protect Dreamers and ensure that they stay in the United States.

#### B. Relevance

The instability of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program is a massive issue. as the program protects young undocumented immigrants, who come to the United States at a very young age and often in circumstances beyond their control, from deportation. These individuals do not have social security numbers, cannot apply for a job, and cannot obtain a driver's license. DACA gives the immigrants a social security number, which enables them to apply for a driver's license, and also gives them work permits. Essentially, the act allows them to live the life of a U.S. national.

However, DACA is extremely unstable due to policies that are constantly challenging the legality of the program; because of its illegality, the Dreamers, the individuals that are impacted by DACA, are losing hope that they will have a permanent place in the country. Now, there are numerous reasons that Dreamers are important to the United States. Dreamers provide a talent pool for the healthcare industry. During a time where healthcare providers are needed now more than ever, 200,000 Dreamers are stepping up to keep the country safe. If these Dreamers were to lose their work permits, which they would if DACA were discontinued, the U.S. health system would lose some of its most gifted medical professionals.

Additionally, most DACA recipients arrived in the United States at the age of 7, and have lived here for more than 20 years. Therefore, they are likely ingrained in communities, families, and groups that simply would not be the same without them. About 254,000 U.S. citizen children have a Dreamer parent who is protected under the program, and 1.5 million people live with DACA recipient family members. Therefore, the failure of the DACA program would not only



affect the lives of any specific Dreamer but also their family and community.

Due to receiving work authorization, DACA recipients have been able to earn individual income which permits them to contribute to the American economy through taxpayer money and through creating new businesses. Dreamers, and their households, pay \$8.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes each year. They also hold approximately \$24 billion in spending power. DACA recipients have managed to start businesses that employ about 86,000 people.

All in all, the instability of the DACA program is a massive issue because of the importance of Dreamers/DACA recipients to the U.S.'s economy and people.

## A. Current Stances

Currently, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program is unlawful. As of now, no new applications for the DACA program are being accepted, but already existing DACA recipients can get their membership renewed.

In the past, to be a DACA recipient you would have to <u>meet</u> all of the following criteria:

- 1. Be under 31 years old on June 15, 2012.
- 2. Have entered the United States before the age of 16.
- Be physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012 and at the time you applied to be a DACA recipient.
- 4. Have no lawful status on June 15, 2012.
- 5. Are either in school, graduated from high school/have a GED/be honorably discharged from the military.
- Have not been convicted of a felony or a serious misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors, and do not post a threat to national security or public safety.

However, due to the federal court ruling in the <u>U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas</u>, even if the criteria above has been met your application to be a recipient of the Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals program will get rejected. The ruling, which occurred in September 2023 declared that the Department of <u>Homeland Security's (DHS) 2022 Final Rule (which formalized DACA)</u>, is unlawful. As a result of this ruling current DACA recipients can keep and renew their status, but no new applications can be processed.

The case will likely be ruled on in the <u>Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and then the Supreme Court</u>, but this will not occur until May or June 2025. Currently, the fate of DACA is in our legal system's hands.

## B. Tried Policy

On June 15, 2012, President Barack Obama established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program through a memorandum from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). His intention with the program was to permit certain undocumented youth to apply for temporary protection from deportation and obtain work authorization. June of 2017 was when the first legal complication arose in regards to this program. Texas' Attorney General Ken Paxton and a group of states threatened to file a lawsuit against the federal government if DACA was not rescinded by September 5th,

2017. Paxton held the belief that the federal executive branch did not have the power to grant unlawfully present aliens lawful presence and work authorization. The lawsuit was asking the federal government to declare DACA unlawful.

Then, in September 2017, the U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the Trump Administration will be ending DACA through a DHS memorandum, which led to a series of court battles challenging the decision made by the administration. The first of these court battles is The Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California. (2017) The ruling on the case instructed the federal government to continue processing DACA renewal requests. Due to this ruling, in January 2018, the Trump administration filed for a petition for a writ of certiorari, which is a legal document that a party files with the U.S. Supreme Court to request a review of a lower court's decision.

Shortly after, in February 2018, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York issued an injunction (an authoritative warning order) against the Trump administration for attempting to end DACA. They named his initiative as "arbitrary and capricious," which was a decision that applied to the cases of *Batalla Vidal v. Nielsen* (2018). That same month the Supreme Court denied the Trump administration's request for a writ of certiorari in the *Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California*.

In April 2018, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to continue processing DACA requests and renewals. They also gave the DHS ninety days to better explain the legal decision to rescind DACA. The cases involved in this decision were *Trump v. NAACP* (2018) and *Trustees of Princeton v. United States of America* (2018) the latter of which eventually contributed to the Supreme Court decision in 2020. Ninety days later, in August 2018, The US District Court for the District of Columbia ordered the DHS to revive DACA. The Trump administration was given twenty days to implement the program and comply with the order.

May 2018, three months prior to the implementation, Texas followed through with their promise and filed a lawsuit challenging DACA. *United States v. Texas* challenges the legalities of DACA, and is filed six years after Daca was first implemented. The judge in this case is Judge Andrew Hanen.

Between November 2018 and June 2020, the Trump administration files petitions for a writ of certiorari for a second time in the Department of Homeland Security v. Regents of the University of California.

case and for the first time in the cases of *Trump v. NAACP* (2018) and <u>Batalla Vidal v. Nielsen</u> (2018). The Supreme Court granted the review of all three petitions, and in June 2020 ruled that the Trump administration's termination of DACA was in fact reviewable by the court and its procedure was in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). The court demanded the reinstatement of DACA, but the court's ruling left space for a re-termination of the program



with proper procedure. Overall, the Supreme Court ordered DHS to continue accepting new applications and renewals.

Unfortunately, the reinstatement of DACA was not long-lasting. A mere 7 months later, in July 2021, <u>Judge Hanen declared DACA to be unlawful because of the manner in which it was implemented</u>. He permits individuals who obtained DACA on or before July 16, 2012 to apply for renewals, but barred the processing of new applications. He also stated that DACA is <u>inconsistent with statutory immigration laws that are found under the Immigration and Nationality Act</u>.

Between September 2021 and June 2023 there was a lot of back and forward between the systems that keep the United States afloat. The DHS released a statement that explains how DACA's implementation was legal. However, this does little to improve the situation. Then, in <u>August 2022</u>, the Biden Administration finalizes a regulation that formalizes the DACA program. The rule maintains the original eligibility rules for DACA and provides access to worthy authorization.

However, the regulation does not do enough to protect DACA, as the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in Texas supports Judge Hanen's ruling on the illegality of the 2012 DACA memorandum. Therefore, the regulation is rendered useless. The Fifth Court of Appeals then handed the case back to Judge Hanen to determine the legality of the newly finalized DACA regulation, published by Biden's Administration.

Finally, in September 2023, Judge Hanen makes a final decision in the case of *United States v. Texas*, and rules that DACA is unlawful, and both President Obama's memorandum and the regulations published by Biden's Administration are also illegitimate, but he still allowed renewals for current DACA recipients.

Recently, in November 2023, an appeal was filed with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, requesting the review of Judge Hanen's recent ruling. The review is predicted to occur sometime in between May or June of 2025, which is when the legality of DACA will be known.

#### III. POLICY PROBLEM

#### A. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders in relation to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program are the recipients of the program, their families, their communities, and their workplaces. Dreamers, DACA recipients, are affected most by this program, as it is their lives the program dictates. If DACA is ruled to be an illegal/illegitimate program, DACA renewals will be halted. Because of that, approximately 530,000 Dreamers may face the annulment of their work authorization, a termination of their social security number, or even deportation. Additionally, DACA being deemed illegitimate prevents future childhood arrivals from ever becoming DACA recipients. Due to the current court rulings, any individual who is not a DACA recipient on, or before July 16, 2012 will not be able to apply to be a recipient. Because of this ruling, there are currently 100,000 new applications for DACA that are pending

review at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If DACA is considered unlawful, those 600,000 individuals who are yet to become a recipient will never receive a chance to gain the benefits of DACA. They will forever remain non-recipients, and may one day be forced to leave a country they have called home all their lives.

#### B. Risks of Indifference

If DACA ends, America will never be the same. Should DACA end, or if its renewals are restricted, DACA recipients would lose their work authorization and any added benefits they get from the program, such as being able to obtain a drivers license. The loss of work authorization would lead to an estimated 18,000 jobs being lost each and every month for two years. America is already facing workplace shortages that are contributing to the ever-rising inflation; ending DACA would only exacerbate the already poor conditions.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, many DACA recipients work jobs that are integral to the American economy. Should DACA renewals be halted, approximately 1,600 DACA recipients working as healthcare professionals, 800 educational professionals, and 600 personal care workers, would be forced out of their jobs each month for two years. Most healthcare professionals go to school for about 10 to 12 years, teachers go to school for 4 to 6 years, and most personal care workers are required to go through at least 75 hours of training before being considered suitable workers for their places of employment. Replacing such a large volume of professionals, who have had years of education and experience, is not something that the United States has the financial resources or manpower to do at a time when the U.S. economy is declining.

Losing DACA would also make upper education more difficult to access, and could negatively impact public universities. Most DACA recipients currently qualify for in-state tuition rates. This allows DACA recipients to attend public universities and pay a manageable tuition fee. However, if DACA were to be considered unlawful, these students may lose their opportunity to pay in-state tuition, forcing them to pay higher out-of-state rates, or make it impossible for them to afford higher education at all. Due to this, fewer DACA recipients could afford to enroll, potentially reducing the revenue that public universities make from this group of students.

Last but certainly not least, if individuals were not permitted to renew their DACA status, they would simply be deported, and ripped away from their family, their friends, and the country they call home.

## C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

<u>Regardless of political affiliations</u>, DACA must be supported because of its economic, humanitarian, and security benefits. DACA recipients are massive contributors to the American economy; they <u>occupy jobs</u> in industries that are experiencing severe labor shortages, such as healthcare and



education. They also pay <u>billions of dollars</u> in taxes, create jobs, and drive economic growth, all of which benefit the entire nation.

In terms of humanitarian benefits, <u>Dreamers were brought into the United States as children</u>. It's likely the Dreamers did not actively choose to immigrate, and because of their lack of choice, did. It is unfair to punish them for immigrating to America. Nonetheless, because they immigrated, they grew up as <u>integral</u> members of American communities. <u>A majority of Dreamers have lived in the U.S. for decades</u>, and have contributed to society in incredible ways. Each and every one of them embody the American ideals of hard work and perseverance. Therefore, protecting their status is a fair, just, and compassionate action that reflects true American values.

Security wise, <u>DACA</u> is a tool that can and has been used to maintain public safety and national security. DACA recipients undergo rigorous background checks and meet strict criteria to qualify. This ensures that they <u>do not pose a threat</u>. The abolition of the DACA program would cause many undocumented individuals to be secretive about their personal details, including where they work, their criminal history, and other critical information. In emergencies or specific situations, knowing these details is essential to ensuring the safety and security of those around them. Ending DACA could lead to a situation where <u>undocumented individuals</u> undocumented individuals feel pressured to lie to law enforcement and live out their lives in fear, making it much more difficult to monitor and regulate their presence.

Overall, the issue of DACA is much bigger than partisanship. It is about upholding the principles of economic prosperity, fairness, and security. DACA is a humane approach to immigration, and to support it means to align yourself with the best interests of all Americans, regardless of political affiliation. DACA embodies the core values of America: a nation built on the promise of opportunity, inclusion, and the belief that everyone deserves a chance to build a better future. For these reasons, DACA should not be abolished and new applications should continue to be processed.

#### IV. POLICY OPTIONS

# **Legality**

One of the main reasons that DACA was initially challenged by a coalition of states, was because the <u>states believed that the federal program infringed upon state powers</u>. It is crucial to publish a memorandum, explaining to the policymakers of our country that DACA does in fact not overstep the power of states. The memorandum should be published by the Department of Justice, and should include the following facts:

 The U.S. Constitution and court system have largely granted the federal government primary jurisdiction over immigration matters, including the power to set policies that are related to immigration and naturalization. DACA is simply an exercise of this federal authority.

- 2. DACA is also similar to other federal programs that address specific parts of immigration policy without overriding state functions, such as the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which is provided to nationals of certain countries experiencing problems that make it difficult or unsafe for their nationals to be deported there.
- 3. DACA does not clash with the existing immigration laws or policies within a state; instead, it provides a framework that matches state-level approaches.

The publishing of this memorandum will ensure that in the future, the states will not be able to use this argument against the federal government, as it will be proven untrue.

DACA is fully Constitutional. While this is not necessarily related to the debate between state jurisdiction vs. federal jurisdiction, it should be included in the DOJ memorandum mentioned prior. The legality of DACA is seen in the U.S. Constitution. Article II, Section Three of the Constitution directly states that the president "shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed." Enforcing immigration laws involves making decisions about who should be prioritized for deportation and who may remain in the country. Additionally, Congress has granted the executive branch discretion over "the administration and enforcement" of these laws. The Supreme Court has also <u>acknowledged</u> that "[a] principal feature of the removal system is the broad discretion exercised by immigration officials ... .Federal officials, as an initial matter, must decide whether it makes sense to pursue [someone's] removal at all...." This means that even if someone is technically eligible for deportation under the law, federal officials first must determine if it is actually sensible to go through with the removal. And more often than not, the federal government spares numerous individuals from deportation due to limited resources. They genuinely must pick and choose who to go after. All in all, what the Constitution tells us, is that a decision to abandon the DACA program would be a political <u>decision – not a legal one.</u>

The legality of DACA being verified in a memorandum published by the DOJ would tip the scales of the future court case regarding the legality of DACA in the DACA recipients and Dreamer's favor.

#### **Dreamers**

In order to combat the issue of Dreamers feeling unwelcome in America, a state-wide program focused on integrating Dreamers into American society should be established. Since passing legislation about Dreamers may be difficult till the 2025 ruling on DACA's permanence occurs, a federal program seems impossible. So, this state-implemented program should partner with companies in the private and public sector in each state to facilitate Dreamers' access to education, employment, and public services. Additionally, it should collaborate with state government members to provide resources and support for Dreamer families, such as legal assistance, education, and employment programs. Since, it is important that Dreamers



feel heard, like American citizens are, the program should focus on ensuring that their needs and challenges are heard and addressed by their community and state. If this state-wide program is integrated, it may help mitigate the effects of legal uncertainties related to DACA. This will keep Dreamers engaged in American politics and support their integration into American society.

### **The Public**

Since the states are troubled by DACA and its recipients, if the individuals residing in those states are convinced that DACA is beneficial, the states may change their mind and look more favorably upon the program. Launching public awareness campaigns through local town meetings, school assemblies, and social media is the most effective way to achieve this. Campaigns that highlight the benefits of DACA recipients on local communities, which can not only create a more inclusive environment for Dreamers, but can also convince states that the DACA program is beneficial. When public sees the advantages of DACA, their representatives-who reflect their constituents' views-are more likely to align with these beliefs. As the overall public opinion grows favorable towards DACA, states may reconsider their prior opinions, leading to smoother integration of the DACA program and fewer objections in the future.

#### V. Conclusions

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is an integral part of U.S. immigration policy, and more broadly, it is a massive part of what America stands for. DACA provides young undocumented immigrants a chance to start a life for themselves in America, the land of the free. Without DACA, these immigrants, who came to the United States involuntarily, would not be able to live a meaningful lifestyle. They would be unable to work, unable to drive, and unable to sustain themselves in the country of hopes and dreams. DACA recipients have proven time and time again that they are invaluable to the United States due to their economic and humanitarian benefits. Despite this, individuals are still insistent upon the removal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which will do so much more than revoke work authorization and worsten labor shortages in the United States, it will discourage talented individuals from contributing to the nation and making it great. Abolishing DACA risks dismantling the dreams and potential of a generation of individuals who have grown up as Americans in every way but on paper.

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