

Submitted via www.regulations.gov

Nov 24, 2021

Andria Strano Acting Chief, Office of Policy and Strategy
Division of Humanitarian Affairs U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20746

Re: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2021-0006, Comment in Response to Deferred Action for
Childhood Arrivals

Dear Acting Chief Strano:

I submit this comment letter in response to the United States Department of Homeland Security's (Department or DHS) proposed rule, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DHS Docket No. USCIS-2021-0006), published September 28, 2021. I write in support of codifying DACA into regulation.

I write in support of codifying DACA into regulation. I write on behalf of Breakthrough Central Texas (BT CTX), an educational non-profit that creates a path to and through college for students who will become the first in their families to earn a college degree. Established in 2002 with 41 students in its inaugural cohort, BT CTX now serves 1,700 secondary students across Central Texas and over 500 still pursuing their postsecondary dreams in Texas and beyond. All 2,220+ of these young people are first-generation college aspirants, over 95% are students of color (70% Latinx), and at least 4 out of 5 qualify for free/reduced price lunch or are Pell Grant-eligible. BT CTX makes a 12+ year commitment – to provide the right support at the right time – to help students and their families overcome the systemic barriers and find college success. Independent studies have confirmed that BT CTX students are significantly more likely to graduate high school on time, twice as likely to enroll in college, and nearly five times more likely to graduate from college than their peers.

Although we do not formally track these demographic data for our students' protection, anecdotal evidence, internal financial aid records, and regional demographic data allows us to estimate that several dozens of the students we serve have DACA status or are DACA eligible. Still others live with siblings, parents, and family members with these statuses. In Texas, *nearly 10% of students* currently enrolled in higher education are first-generation immigrant students, with half of those currently undocumented. The other half, almost 31,000, are DACA-eligible. At BT CTX, the youth and their families who have been able to regularize their status, particularly through the DACA program, have had far better postsecondary and career outcomes than their peers. Especially for first generation college-aspiring youth who frequently come from working class homes and communities, access to work authorization and a driver's license plays a critical role in addressing the financial costs of postsecondary education that extend beyond tuition and fees like purchasing textbooks and other course materials, housing and transportation, childcare, health insurance, and other personal expenses. Underestimated and unexpected direct expenses associated with college affordability decrease student retention, especially for students from low-income backgrounds.

Preserving and fortifying DACA would prevent the deportation of approximately 690,000 DACA recipients nationally who make invaluable contributions to our learning communities and professional industries daily. Unfortunately, DACA still remains out of reach to many because they can no longer apply for it and, even if they could, they would not meet the requirement that they have arrived in the country before June 15, 2007. In Texas, 17,000 youth graduate high school without any legal status each year, and the vast majority of them cannot rely on DACA for relief because eligibility rules have not altered since they were originally outlined in the 2012 memo. BT CTX and its partner institutions and organizations continue to struggle to support more and more of these ambitious and deserving students that must navigate the transition to postsecondary education and career with significant economic, social, and legal barriers related to their status. We encourage the following bold updates to DACA in order for it to continue to serve its original purpose: (1) Move up continuous residency date from June 15, 2007, (2) Move up physical presence date from June 15, 2011, and (3) Remove age cap.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit public comment on the proposed rule.

Sincerely,

Will Davies
Breakthrough Central Texas