



## DACA: What It Means for Dreamers and Their Families

Photo Credit: CNS/Kevin Lamarque, Reuters

### Who Are Dreamers?

Dreamers are young people who were brought to the United States without authorization as children by their parents or family members. Dreamers include: young people who have received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), those who are eligible and did not apply for DACA, and other undocumented individuals of a similar age group who did not make the age-cut off for DACA (as they were slightly older or younger at the time of the inception of the DACA program in 2012 or at the time of the attempted end of the program in 2017). Dreamers are woven into the fabric of our country and of our Church, they are mothers and fathers, contributors to our economy, veterans of our military, doctors, academic standouts in our universities, and leaders in our parishes.

### Are DACA Recipients and Their Families Still at Risk?

Yes. On September 5, 2017 the Trump Administration attempted to end DACA, allowing one-time renewal for those whose status was set to expire between September 5, 2017 and March 5, 2018. For nearly three years the attempt to terminate DACA was the subject of litigation and multiple nationwide preliminary injunctions. On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court issued a [ruling](#) that has at least temporarily prevented the Administration from ending DACA. Although the DACA program is safe for the time being, it is essential that Congress act to provide a more permanent protection to DACA recipients.

### What Could Be the Impact on Dreamers and Their Families?

As there is no legislation that has passed both the Senate and the House to protect Dreamers, DACA recipients and their families still face an uncertain future. If there is an attempt to end the DACA program again, they may face the possibility of deportation, which means that many DACA youth could be separated from their children, spouses, relatives, and communities and sent back to a country that they might not even remember. They may also face the possibility of having their ability to work revoked when their status expires, putting themselves and their families at greater risk of economic, food, and housing insecurity, as well as decreased access to health care and other services.

### How Many Families Would be Affected if DACA Were to be Rescinded in the Future?

There are approximately 700,000 individuals living in the US who currently have DACA.<sup>1</sup> And nearly 1.5 million individuals live in households with a DACA recipient, including more than a 250,000 US citizen children of DACA recipients. If DACA were to be rescinded in the future, well over 1 million families across the US will be drastically affected by this ruling and have their lives completely uprooted, with over a quarter million US citizen children facing the possibility being separated from their parents.

## What Happens to the U.S. Citizen Children if Their DACA Parents are Deported?

DACA parents who have U.S. citizen children could face heartbreaking choices no parent should have to make. If they no longer have legal status, they could (1) return to their country of origin and bring their children with them; (2) return to their country of origin and leave behind their children; or (3) they could risk slipping into undocumented status in the United States. Each one of these options carries extreme devastation to the family unit, especially the children. Whether the children lose out on the love and presence of their parents, or the benefits of an American education they are entitled to as U.S. citizens, there is no decent or family-friendly answer.

### Edna's Story<sup>2</sup>

Edna is a young woman who works at one of the Catholic dioceses. She is a college-educated leader in her community and parish, wife and mother of a U.S. citizen child. Edna and her husband, also a DACA recipient, are terrified about what will happen to their son if DACA is cancelled. She feels very strongly that her son should stay in his school and home and does not feel safe taking him back to Edna's home country. Edna and her husband are sick with despair about what to do.

## Why Does the Catholic Church Support Dreamers and Their Families?

Pope Francis has long spoke of the importance of family, in his address at the 2015 World Meeting of Families he said that, "family life is something worthwhile, and that a society grows stronger and better, it grows in beauty and it grows in truth, when it rises on the foundation of the family."<sup>3</sup> As Catholics, we believe that the dignity of every human being, particularly that of youth and families, must be protected. The Catholic Bishops have long supported Dreamers and their families and continue to do so. As Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, Texas, Chairman of the Committee on Migration has stated: "As a nation, we have a moral and humanitarian obligation to Dreamers. These young people have steadfastly worked to improve themselves and our country and attempted in good faith to comply with the law as it stood. Their futures hang in the balance."<sup>4</sup>

## What Can You Do to Protect Dreamers and Their Families?

- (1) Urge Your Senators to Pass Legislation Giving Dreamers a Path to Citizenship — Urge your Senators to support legislative protections for DACA recipients generally and the Dream Act, specifically.
- (2) Pray for Dreamers — [Pray](#) for Dreamers during this difficult and uncertain time so that they and their families may feel supported and the support of the Lord. Pray also that our elected leaders exhibit moral leadership and provide a path to citizenship for Dreamers.
- (3) Help Stand in Solidarity — Access to trusted legal resources at this time is vital. Share resources from reputable sources such as [CLINIC](#), the Catholic Legal Immigration Network.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools, Migration Policy Institute (Aug. 31, 2018), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>.

<sup>2</sup> Name changed to protect identity.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Prayer Vigil For The Festival of Families (Sept. 26, 2015), available at [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150926\\_usa-festa-famiglie.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150926_usa-festa-famiglie.html).

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, Statement on Support for Finding a Legislative Solution for Dreamers; Ready to Work with Congress and White House (Jan. 10, 2018), available at <http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-007.cfm>.