



# Dreamers on the Frontlines of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Photo: Jon Shapley, Houston Chronicle

## What Is the Connection Between Dreamers and COVID-19?

Our nation's healthcare workers are a source of hope as they put their own health at risk ensuring those affected by COVID 19 receive great care. Approximately 27,000 of these vital professionals are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).<sup>1</sup> DACA was implemented in 2012; The Trump Administration attempted to end DACA on September 5, 2017, 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. In a decision issued on June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court issued a [ruling](#) that has at least temporarily prevented the Administration from ending the program. Although the DACA program is safe from elimination for the time being, it is essential that Congress act to provide more permanent protection to DACA recipients.

## What Happens Now That the Supreme Court Upheld DACA?

It is imperative that Congress now acts to pass legislation like the DREAM Act that will provide permanent relief to DACA and Dreamer youth. The termination of DACA would not only put the approximately 700,000 recipients of the program at risk of deportation,<sup>2</sup> but also remove essential workers from the front lines of the effort to fight the pandemic. There are approximately 62,600 DACA-eligible health care workers and over 280,000 undocumented health care workers.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, there are approximately 200 DACA recipient medical students and doctors.<sup>4</sup>

## Are the DACA Recipient Healthcare Workers Vital to Our Health Care Industry?

Yes. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Medical Association (AMA) argued in their amicus brief for the November 2019 Supreme Court case that the loss of DACA health care workers would be devastating to the health care system.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, public health experts predict the virus will lead to an additional shortage of health care workers, as those providing direct care to infected patients are at high risk of contracting the virus and may eventually need treatment themselves.<sup>6</sup>

# Is Health Care the Only Critical Industry That Would Be Severely Negatively Affected by Ending DACA?

No. The efforts to fight COVID-19 go far beyond health care. Essential workers from many fields put their health at risk to ensure that the population can maintain social distancing and curtail the spread of the virus. The Center for Migration Studies reports that 21,000 DACA recipients work in transportation and warehousing, 12,400 are employed at supermarkets, and 3,200 work at pharmacies.<sup>7</sup> These DACA workers' contributions are vital to managing the food, merchandise and medical supply chains that American families rely on to stay safe.

## Manuel's Story<sup>8</sup>

Manuel Bernal, is a DACA recipient and a resident at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Chicago. He puts himself at risk everyday by working in one of the busiest trauma centers in the city. Bernal arrived from Mexico with his family when he was two and DACA allowed him to follow his dream of becoming a doctor. Now the potential end of DACA puts his future in question but he continues to treat COVID-19 positive patients.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), American Medical Association available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>.

<sup>2</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools, Migration Policy Institute (9/30/2020) available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>.

<sup>3</sup> *Undocumented Immigrants and the COVID-19 Crisis*, New American Economy (4/4/2020) available at <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/undocumented-immigrants-covid-19-crisis/>.

<sup>4</sup> Tanya Albert Henry, *Physicians weigh in on DACA case before Supreme Court*, AMA(11/12/2020) available at <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/economics/physicians-weigh-daca-case-supreme-court>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Selena Simmons-Duffin, *States Get Creative To Find And Deploy More Health Workers In COVID-19 Fight*, NPR (3/20/2020), available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/25/820706226/states-get-creative-to-find-and-deploy-more-health-workers-in-covid-19-fight>.

<sup>7</sup> Daniela Alulema, *DACA Recipients are Essential Workers and Part of the Front-line Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, as Supreme Court Decision Looms, Center for Migration Studies (3/30/2020) available at <https://cmsny.org/daca-essential-workers-covid/>.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Sacchetti, *Dreamers risk lives on pandemic's front line while they await a decision on their own futures*, Washington Post (4/11/2020) available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/dreamers-risk-lives-on-pandemics-front-lines-while-they-await-court-ruling/2020/04/11/d34a7b58-76c4-11ea-85cb-8670579b863d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/dreamers-risk-lives-on-pandemics-front-lines-while-they-await-court-ruling/2020/04/11/d34a7b58-76c4-11ea-85cb-8670579b863d_story.html).



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