

## US tech companies urge Biden administration to protect documented dreamers

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A few weeks after US lawmakers met with 40 documented dreamers from across the US on Capitol Hill to lobby in support of the America's CHILDREN Act, a group of major technology companies have now written a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, urging him to review archaic immigration policies and stop self-deportation of dreamers.

The tech companies include Amazon, Google, Twitter, Uber, and IBM amongst others, stated that currently 200,000 documented dreamers are in the US under the visa status of their parents, and their letter went on to state, "the children of many long-term non-immigrant workers face tremendous obstacles staying united with their families in the U.S. due to the ever-growing immigrant visa backlogs and archaic rules that punish them for merely growing up."

The letter, in a bid to safeguard rights and talents of these individuals, further explained, "they go to school, join clubs and sports teams, make friends, and become part of the fabric of local communities across the country. They begin to build their own American dream. However, once they turn 21, they "age-out" of their legal status in the U.S. This uncertainty harms families and prevents our companies from attracting and retaining critical talent in the U.S."

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, U.S. Representatives Ami Bera, D-California, and Deborah Ross, D-North Carolina, joined U.S. Senator Alex Padilla, D-California, and Senate Judiciary Committee Chair, Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, spoke in support of passing the America's CHILDREN Act, a bipartisan legislation which would protect Documented Dreamers after aging out.

Maunica Sthanki, a Washington D.C. based immigration policy strategist and former counsel for the Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security for the House Judiciary Committee, told News India Times, "I applaud the tech industry for being responsive to the needs of their employees, for coming up with creative policy solutions and advocating to the federal government."

Sthanki, a daughter of Indian-American refugees from Uganda, who has over two decades of experience in immigration advocacy from representing detained immigrants at the Southern border, to teaching immigration law, and drafting legislation on Capitol Hill, said that there is a need to completely review and update the immigration system to ensure fairness. “The situation of documented dreamers is heartbreaking, but overall, the entire US immigration system is broken and has been broken for a very long time,” adding, “we need a full overhaul of our immigration laws in order to respond to the changing needs of the global economy. We also need an immigration system that prioritizes fairness, family unity and humanitarian protection.”

While stating that the precarious situation of both documented and undocumented children needs to be addressed by Congress, Sthanki feels there will be ongoing challenges but is heartened about bipartisan efforts by legislators. “Unfortunately we are in a very challenging political environment and full legislative passage will be difficult. Still, it is heartening to see bipartisan lawmakers come together to address an immigration reform issue,” added Sthanki.

Devang Shah, a business immigration attorney at a Maryland-based Immigration law firm, Shah & Kishore, who has represented tech companies primarily hiring Indian Citizens on H-1B visas told News India Times, “maintaining unified families is one of the basic tenets of our immigration system. I have witnessed first-hand the current system’s inequities for children whose parents followed the legal path towards becoming a permanent resident. The lack of movement in priority dates prevents tens of thousands of children born in India but raised in the United States from receiving a green card with their parents.”

Maintaining that it is a complicated situation when kids have to return to India without their parents, Shah added, “often times the child is able to change their status to a student visa but then must go back on the line for priority dates and wait 20 plus years to obtain permanent resident status on their own instead of through their parents. America’s Children Act will provide a huge relief to these families and allow their children to follow the American Dream.”

The tech companies’ letter detailed reasons why foreign born workers and Dreamers are an asset to the US economy, which is already facing a hit due to the pandemic. “Earlier this spring, American companies had more than 11 million open jobs – 5 million more openings than workers. Many of these job vacancies are for highly-skilled positions, and U.S. companies recruit foreign-born workers to fill in the worker shortages,” adding, “these openings are especially critical given the pandemic as the U.S. seeks to maintain its world leader status in innovation and ingenuity. H-1B visa holders and other foreign national workers on nonimmigrant visas are critical drivers of economic growth in the U.S. economy.”

A Wall Street Journal article, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, by Michelle Hackman and Teresa Mettela, stated that since 2018 about 10,000 children annually lose protection from their parents’ immigration status as they transition into adulthood, citing David Bier, an immigration research fellow at the Cato Institute.

According to the article, in 2012, President Barack Obama introduced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program to protect children whose parents came to this country illegally, from deportation. However, documented dreamers, the children of the legally entered non-immigrant visa holders, are not covered by the DACA program. As of 2020, about 636,000 people were participating in DACA, according to a Congressional Research Service report.

Currently, there is a huge green-card backlog and Indians amount to 82 per cent in that backlog. According to immigration researchers “an Indian applicant applying for an employment-based green card today can expect to wait 80 years,” stated the article.

With regard to the green card backlog, the letter stated, “policymakers should take steps to preserve the ability of children to remain in the U.S. and work while waiting in the green card backlog. We also encourage Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that provides a long-term resolution to this problem. We welcome the opportunity to discuss potential solutions with the Biden Administration and members of Congress in both parties.”

The letter added, “we urge the administration to establish more robust aging out policies so that the children of long-term visa holders can continue as beneficiaries of their parents’ pending green card applications even after they turn 21.”

Others who signed the letter include American Immigration Lawyers Association, Bloomberg, FWD.us, Improve The Dream, Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), Intuit, Juniper Networks, Nielsen, Salesforce, South Asian Bar Association, TechNet, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce.