

BRIDES

Why the DACA Announcement Is Devastating for Families

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“This [country] is all I know.” Sanchez Marban told CNN. Marban entered the U.S. when she was seven years old and is one of the hundreds of thousands of American residents left unsure of their future after recent announcements about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). “My mom had to walk through the desert and everything,” Marban explained. “This is the only life we know. This is where we have our friends, our family, our schools, our jobs. This is everything to us.”

But today’s announcement from Jeff Sessions means that many may lose their status in the U.S.: The administration won’t consider new applications for legal status from today onward. Those who are already enrolled in DACA will have one month to reapply—but that will only be good for a two-year period. Even more confusingly, there will be a further decision made on the DACA program in six months, leading many to think that the administration is just waiting until then to end the program completely, leaving thousands of people in limbo. In any case, Sessions has described the process as the Department of Homeland Security beginning an “orderly lawful wind-down” of DACA.

Though Trump has tweeted that he loves the “dreamers”—the term often used to describe those enrolled in DACA—this wind-down says exactly the opposite. “In a background call held before the attorney general’s remarks, senior officials at DHS say Mr. Trump was ‘very involved’ in the process of rolling back DACA, saying the process would be the least disruptive and orderly phase-out of the program,” CBS reports. But it’s very much a process that will inevitably break families up and cause a huge amount of stress to people who have spent their entire adulthood building a life in America.

Many are unaware of the rigorous criteria for DACA. The program was introduced by Barack Obama in 2012 to allow those who entered the country illegally as children to receive a two-year working visa. It was aimed at those who came into the States before 2007 and before they were 16 years of age—and who were still under the age of 31 when DACA was introduced. So, it is only for those who have spent most of their formative years in the U.S. On top of that, to be eligible for the program, you need to be in school, have a high school diploma, or be a military veteran. They also have to have a mostly clean legal record. Contrary to popular belief, it does not guarantee a path to citizenship, but it does make things like opening bank accounts or getting a driver’s license possible. Once you have been enrolled, you need to reapply every two years.

Estimates say that repealing DACA could mean losing over 800,000 members of the U.S. workforce. "Using the most conservative estimates, ending DACA would impose massive costs on employers—nearly \$2 billion over two years," David Bier, a policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, told CNN. The Cato Institute also estimated that the cost of the deportations that would arise if DACA was repealed would be around \$60 billion and it would reduce economic growth by \$280 billion over the next 10 years.

To get a sense of just how devastating an impact this will have, it's important to appreciate just how many of the DACA enrollees were very young when they came to America. According to Vox, almost half of those who have benefited from DACA arrived before their sixth birthday. Not only did they have no say in entering the country, but they have also spent virtually their entire lives here. Deportation would mean being ripped away from their family, friends, and their entire existence.

"Trump's repeal of DACA exposes hundreds of thousands of people to deportation by a cruel and unjust immigration system that fails to take into account their deep ties to the U.S.," said Jasmine L. Tyler, U.S. advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "Using the 'Dreamers' as political pawns for drastic cuts in legal immigration and increased detention undercuts Trump's promise to treat them 'with heart.'" Instead, it means that those protected by DACA could be separated from parents, partners, extended family, and, of course, friends. And that's without even considering the hundreds of thousands of children and young people who won't have the opportunity to enroll in the program at all.

"If you're really pro-family, what a terrible stress that is on a family," Sanchez Marban's boss, immigration attorney Jeff Larson, told CBS. "So if we're talking about family values, those families also have to be included." But instead the administration is, yet again, disregarding the rights and necessities of families.

The future of DACA is unclear, but the steps made today send a crystal clear message to those enrolled in DACA: Their status may be unclear, but the administration is telling them that they are not valued, that their time in America isn't valued, and that their family ties will not be valued.