

DACA Phase Out Faces Backlash

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Though President Donald J. Trump tweeted Sept. 7 that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients “have nothing to worry about” during the six-month phase out, some — including Emory community members, government officials and organizations — nationwide have pressed the administration to keep the DACA recipients in the country past the March 2018 expiration date.

DACA is a temporary immigration benefit granted to some undocumented immigrants who entered the United States before their 16th birthday. The program offers a work permit and two years of deportation protection. To be eligible for the program, recipients had to be enrolled in high school or hold the equivalent of a high school diploma and have a clean criminal record.

University President Claire E. Sterk, along with 56 other Association of American Universities (AAU) presidents and chancellors, sent a Sept. 7 letter to key congressional leaders, explaining that DACA students “contribute to our society” and imploring Congress to take legislative action.

“America needs hardworking talented people – and these students are already meaningful members of our society,” the AAU letter said. In the letter, the university leaders also advocated for adoption of the BRIDGE Act, Dream Act or legislation that would “mirror” DACA.

A group of attorneys general from 15 states and Washington, D.C. filed a lawsuit Sept. 6 in an attempt to block termination of the DACA program, according to The Washington Post.

“Rescinding the [DACA] program punishes and disparages people with Mexican roots,” the attorneys general wrote. The lawsuit also said that colleges, workforces, economies and companies will be negatively impacted by the termination of DACA.

California also filed a lawsuit with Maine, Minnesota and Maryland Sept. 11 to fight against the phase-out of DACA, according to the Los Angeles Times. California did not file a lawsuit with the other 15 states and D.C., as it believes the program affects California more than it does to other states.

“[DACA is] fully lawful, it’s totally American in its values and it’s an unmitigated success for California’s economy and the country’s economy,” California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a recent interview with the LA Times.

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed condemned Trump's decision to end the DACA program in a Sept. 5 press release.

"President Trump's assault on DACA is an attack on the American dream and all who worked hard to achieve it," the statement said.

Student organizations on Emory's campus also issued statements against deporting DACA beneficiaries.

Emory Student Government Association (SGA)'s Diversity and Equity Committee sent a Sept. 9 statement in support of DACA recipients via Orgsync.

"We understand that not everyone on the Emory campus shares the same beliefs, and we have diverse opinions on DACA," the Diversity and Equity Committee's statement said. "If you know someone on campus who will be affected by this decision, we ask that you express tolerance for their situation and compassion towards their emotions."

Student group Young Democrats of Emory also spoke out against the decision in a Sept. 5 Facebook post, writing, "Trump is threatening to destroy families and cripple our economy."

The University of California (UC) filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration Sept. 8, writing that Trump's actions are "unconstitutional, unjust and unlawful" to the 4,000 undocumented students enrolled in the UC system, according to a UC Office of the President press release.

"[Trump's] capricious rescission of the DACA program violates both the procedural and substantive requirements of the APA (Administrative Procedure Act), as well as the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment," the UC lawsuit states.

Former President Barack Obama posted a statement on Facebook, criticizing the phase out of DACA.

"To target these young people is wrong — because they have done nothing wrong," Obama wrote. "Ultimately, this is about basic decency. This is about whether we are a people who kick hopeful young strivers out of America, or whether we treat them the way we'd want our own kids to be treated. It's about who we are as a people — and who we want to be."

Pope Francis also chimed in about Trump's decision while aboard the papal plane on his way back to the Vatican from Colombia, according to The New York Times.

"[The president] presents himself as pro-life and if he is a good pro-lifer, he understands that family is the cradle of life and its unity must be protected," the pope said according to the Times. "I hope [legislators] rethink it a bit."

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said Sept. 8 that he believes Congress will find a solution for the affected undocumented people, according to Politico.

"We've got a timeline, six months. Now we've got to go find where the consensus is on how to come to it with a solution," Ryan said during a The New York Times interview. "The six months gives us the kind of time we need."

David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, told The Post that out of the estimated 800,000 immigrants who benefit from DACA, “roughly 595,000 will have their permits expire.”

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced Sept. 5 Trump’s plan to “rescind” the DACA program. No new applications for DACA will be accepted, but any person with existing benefits will have those benefits until the expiration date, up until two years from Sept. 5, according to a White House press release.

“I do not favor punishing children, most of whom are now adults, for the actions of their parents,” Trump said in the statement. “But we must also recognize that we are [a] nation of opportunity because we are a nation of laws.”

For the time being, Trump has placed the future of DACA recipients in the hands of Congress.

“Congress now has 6 months to legalize DACA (something the Obama Administration was unable to do). If they can’t, I will revisit this issue!” Trump tweeted Sept. 5.