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Defend the Dreamers, immigration advocates demand in Frelinghuysen's Morristown office

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Chanting “we are not political pawns, and neither are our children!,” activists shoehorned into the Morristown office of Rep. **Rodney Frelinghuysen** (R-11th Dist) on Wednesday to protest President Trump's termination of a program that shields some 800,000 young adults from deportation.

They demanded a meeting with the Congressman — who has dismissed such requests since Trump's election — and urged him to side with House Speaker **Paul Ryan** (R-WI) in opposing Trump's order to end DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Led by the Morristown-based **Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center**, members of NJ 11th for Change, the Green Party, the Morristown Unitarian Fellowship and Madison's Grace Episcopal Church also demanded that Frelinghuysen, chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, vote against Trump's “hateful budget that appeases white supremacists and terrorizes communities of color.”

Despite demonstrators' growing frustration — they have staged **overnight vigils** and rallies with people from across the Northeast, hoping for an audience with Frelinghuysen — the event was civil. A handful of Morristown police and Morris County Sheriff's Officers observed quietly.

Aura Dunn, Frelinghuysen's district director, said she would relay the activists' concerns to her boss.

In a statement earlier this week, Frelinghuysen said:

“The ‘Dreamers’ were brought to this country through no fault of their own and, for many, this is the only country they have ever known. However, even these compelling facts do not allow us to ignore the fact that President Obama overstepped his authority and attempted to change immigration law without the approval of Congress.

“We should not punish these innocent young people. In my view, Congress must debate and approve legislation to ‘fix’ this policy asap!”

Frelinghuysen, who has supported Trump's policies, has criticized the **President's pardon** of former Sheriff **Joe Arpaio** of Arizona and his **“incomprehensible reaction”** to the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, VA.

Similar pro-DACA rallies were scheduled for Wednesday at the office of Rep. **Leonard Lance**(R-7th Dist.), and in Newark.

‘I HAVE FAITH IN THE UNITED STATES’

On Tuesday, President Trump ordered a **six-month phaseout** of the program, established in 2012 by President Obama’s executive order.

It offers protections to young adults who were brought into this country illegally, enabling them to hold jobs if they qualify.

Starting in March, some of these so-called “Dreamers” may face deportation. Attorney General **Jeff Sessions**, announcing Trump’s decision, questioned the legality of Obama’s order and said it siphoned jobs from native-born Americans.

Trump later said he would revisit the matter if Congress failed to “legalize DACA” in six months.

“It’s all a lot of hooey,” said **Richard Kushnier**, a Wayne resident who waved a “Deport Trump” sign outside Frelinghuysen’s office on Wednesday.

“We’re here to make sure that these poor young people have a chance to stay in our country and remain productive in the place they call home,” said Kushnier, who works in corporate communications.

Citing a **report** by the conservative Cato Institute, **Brian Lozano** of Wind of the Spirit said “we stand to lose a lot in taxes” from the cancellation of DACA.

Over 10 years, that study estimated, a repeal of DACA would cost the federal government \$60 billion in revenue, and the economy would take a \$215 billion hit.

The total impact in New Jersey, which Lozano said has about 22,000 DACA recipients, would be \$1.76 billion over that same period, the Cato report calculated.

“How can they say we are not contributing? We work. We are part of the country. We follow the law. We pay taxes,” said Elizabeth (not her real name).

The 28-year-old Morristown High School graduate fears she may be deported to Colombia next year when her DACA term expires.

Elizabeth was 10 when her parents brought her here with her ailing sister, who was 4, for treatment of a serious medical condition.

The family was sponsored by a relative who is a U.S. citizen, under a federal program that laid out a 10-year-path to permanent residency, she said.

When that sponsor changed her mind, it led to \$4,000 fines for each of her family members, and caused she and her sister to register for DACA protection.

Elizabeth’s father worked two blue-collar jobs, and her mother worked, too, to send her to college — she was ineligible for federal assistance— and she studied marketing and business administration.

Now, Elizabeth works for a nonprofit, struggling to put her sister through college.

“Being called an illegal alien hurts,” Elizabeth said. “I love this country. I know more about it than about my own country.”

She and other Dreamers are in limbo, unable to pursue careers or buy homes because of their uncertain futures, she said. Many are terrified of where they may land.

“A lot of people are from really horrible countries. Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries to live in. If these people have to go back, I really fear for them,” Elizabeth said.

She vowed to fight, peacefully, for the right to stay.

“I have faith in the United States,” Elizabeth said. “And if it doesn’t happen, at least I met a lot of people who were willing to fight for us.”