



Florida's 27,000 'Dreamers' are living their lives in fear and uncertainty

Michael Moline

July 8, 2019

"Dreamer" Adrian Escarate ordinarily wouldn't need to renew his registration under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program, until next June.

But now that the U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review the program during its next term, he's thinking about reapplying early – just in case.

"I've never let my status dictate my life," Escarate said by telephone from Miami, where he works as a tennis coach. But the prospect that the high court might strike down the program got his attention, and that of other DACA beneficiaries he's talked with, he said.

Escarate is one of 27,000 of the so-called "Dreamers" who live in Florida, according to FWD.us (pronounced "forward") an immigration-reform lobby financed by the high-tech industry. "We encourage all eligible DACA recipients to renew as soon as possible," said Ted Hutchinson, the group's Florida director, in a written statement.

"It's not a nightmare situation," Escarate said. "But it's a lot more present after what happened," when the justices announced recently that they would review federal court rulings related to efforts to dismantle DACA.

Hundreds of thousands Dreamers — not just those in Florida — are awaiting their fate, now that the U.S. Supreme Court has decided to consider whether the program should be allowed to stay in place or be struck down.

The "Dreamer" appellation comes from the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, which would regularize the immigration status of people brought to the United States as children and who know no other country, but which has languished in Congress since 2001.

President Obama authorized the DACA program in 2012, invoking his executive authority to defer immigration proceedings against people brought to the United States before the age of 16, subject to a stringent criminal background check.

The program allows Dreamers such as Escarate to work and go to school without fear, although they need to re-register with the Department of Homeland Security every two years.

Pending a Supreme Court decision, it's not clear what rescission would mean. A Sept. 5 memorandum signed by then-Acting DHS Secretary Elaine Duke anticipated that during the

DACA wind-down the department would continue to screen initial and renewal applications already on file but would not accept new ones. Neither would the department accept new applications for authorization to travel abroad and re-enter the country.

That would appear to leave Dreamers without DACA's protections if they haven't already applied or when their authorization expires. The administration has said it has no plans to actively hunt them down, but they'd lose their authorization to work legally, according to a [Cato Institute analysis](#). And immigration officials could round up Dreamers during raids on parents in the country without authorization.

"We would advise them to renew as soon as possible," [Florida Immigrant Coalition](#), or FLIC, spokeswoman Melissa Tavares said, echoing FWD.us' Hutchinson. "As long as they are protected – as long as they have documentation – they are not under threat of deportation. They are able to obtain drivers' licenses and go to school and go to work. They are able to function."

The justices said they would hear arguments during the term that begins in October and ends on the last day of June 2020. That's Escarate's deadline to renew his registration. The court's move was "deeply disappointing and will force Dreamers to continue to live their lives in fear and uncertainty," Hutchinson said.

"We are proud to work with our partners on the ground to improve the lives of Dreamers and their families, such as by expanding access to higher education for hardworking Florida DACA recipients," he said. "However, only Congress can pass legislation to protect Dreamers permanently from the threat of deportation. We will continue working with members on both sides of the aisle to provide Dreamers the certainty to continue living in the only country most of them have ever known as home."

The U.S. House recently approved revamped legislation – [HR 6, the American Dream and Promise Act](#) – that would prohibit immigration authorities from seeking deportation of people eligible for DACA or temporary protected or deferred enforcement status. However, its prospects in the GOP-controlled Senate are at best uncertain. The proposed law would cover nearly 200,000 people in Florida, mostly in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties, according to [an analysis](#) by the Center for American Progress.

FLIC, meanwhile, has been working with the national group, United We Dream, to raise money to help Dreamers pay the \$495 processing fee to apply for DACA protection. Applicants for temporary protected status pay the same amount, Tavares said.

For Dreamers such as Escarate, the debate is nerve wracking. "You feel kind of like a punching bag. There's so much back and forth," he said. "I'm turning 31 in September. I would hope that the situation didn't exist anymore and we would have a permanent solution. Unfortunately, that's not the case."

Not only that – Escarate fears his DACA registration means immigration authorities have his name and address and could round him up at any time should the court strike down the program. "They have everything," he said.

Escarate's parents brought him to South Florida during the early 1990s from Chile – a country Escarate knows little about – when he was three.

They overstayed their tourist visas and his father found work with a relative at a janitorial service. The other members of his family have regularized their status – in fact, an older brother is now a U.S. citizen, and his parents will be eligible for citizenship this year – but there was no money for Escarate to do that, and in any case the process can take years.

“I’m the only one who’s out of the loop,” he said.