



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Washington state officials preparing to defend DACA program

Asia Fields

September 1, 2017

The future of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals has yet to be determined, but Washington state's Congressional delegation, governor, attorney general and immigration attorneys are preparing to defend the program.

Republican attorneys general from 10 states have said they will challenge DACA in federal court if President Donald Trump does not end the program by Sept. 5. Trump is expected to make a decision as soon as Friday.

Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson has said he is “prepared to support efforts to defend DACA by all appropriate means, including court action.” On Aug. 29, a spokesperson from the AG's office said Ferguson is waiting to see what happens.

Gov. Jay Inslee said he would “fight in every way” for Dreamers – undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children – in Washington state, in an opinion piece for CNN.

There are 17,843 DACA recipients in Washington state, according to the most recent data – which goes through March 2017 – from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The number is for initial approvals and excludes renewals – in order to avoid recipients being counted multiple times.

Local immigration attorney Hannah Stone said if Trump were to end the program, new applications and renewals would not be processed, but current DACA recipients would likely be able to stay until their authorization expires – the program requires renewal every two years.

“There's concern about the Sept. 5 deadline. At the same time, this is a mental and emotional and physical state that these people have been living in for a long time, because deferred action has never been something that's permanent,” Stone said.

Some of Stone's clients call her after renewing with DACA a few times, expecting for there to be a next step toward a permanent status.

“There really isn't a next step. Basically, deferred action is a dead end,” she said.

Stone said while DACA is important in giving recipients temporary work authorization and “quasi-permission to be in the United States,” it does not actually give them legal status. Technically, someone with deferred action could still be subject to deportation, she said.

Washington state's U.S. senators and representatives have called for the program to continue and for immigration reform – Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell joined 40 other senators and sent a letter to Trump in July, asking him to protect DACA.

As cited in the letter, the conservative CATO Institute estimates that deporting DACA recipients would cost more than \$60 billion and would result in a \$280 billion reduction in economic growth over the next decade.

The Center for American Progress' estimate is \$460.3 billion for the next decade. For Washington state, the estimated annual loss is around \$1.1 billion if DACA workers were to be removed from the state economy.

Trump's top aides have pushed him to use DACA as a bargaining chip to get immigration policies he favors, such as funding for the border wall and more detention facilities. Democrats in Congress have opposed the idea.

“It's shameful that President Trump is holding DACA recipients hostage to his misguided campaign promise to build a wall which most Americans think is a waste of time and money,” Rep. Suzan DelBene, a Democrat who represents most of Whatcom County, told The Bellingham Herald last week.

Trump's DACA decision expected soon; Dreamers prepare for worst, hope for best

Some advocates are hoping for a solution from Congress, such as the DREAM Act, a bipartisan effort introduced by Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham and Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin to give DACA recipients a path to permanent residency.

Trump has already indicated he won't sign on to the DREAM Act if it were to pass, and previous efforts to pass the bill have failed.

An April 2017 poll by Morning Consult found around three-fourths of registered voters support allowing Dreamers to stay in the country, and 56 percent of voters said Dreamers should also have a path to citizenship.