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Kicking out 'Dreamers' is bad for America and for business

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Since the Trump administration announced earlier this month that it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, there's been an outpouring of sympathy for the 800,000 young people who would be directly affected. There are at least 42,000 such New Yorkers, around 10,000 of whom will be eligible for an extension if they file by an Oct. 5 deadline. The rest are facing the terrifying reality of being deported back to a country they don't call home.

This is a humanitarian crisis. But an end to the program would also have economic and fiscal consequences for New Yorkers and all Americans. It is estimated that the forced firing of all the young people working on DACA permits could cost the U.S. economy upwards of $460 billionover the next decade. New York state is projected to lose well over $2 billion in GDP each year. According to research from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, DACA eligible immigrants in New York state generate more than $140 million in tax revenue annually.

Since its inception five years ago, DACA has enabled young people who were brought to this country before the age of 16 and have not committed any crime to pursue careers, attend college, purchase homes, and contribute to the tax base. Created in 2012 by former President Barack Obama, DACA has been an important first step in developing a path to legalization for about 10% of the country's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants. Thanks to DACA, those kids, who are known as Dreamers, are now on average 25 years old and either pursuing an advanced degree or earning a steady income, according to research from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. Some 91% of DACA permit holders are employed and earn an average annual salary of $36,000, while 44% are earning a degree, 17% are pursuing a masters and 5% have started their own business.

A full rescission of the program would come at a significant cost to employers big and small: At least 72% of the top 25 Fortune 500 companies employ DACA workers. Here in New York, the Center for American Progress estimates that such a dramatic workforce reduction would suck $2.6 billion out of the state, home to approximately 42,000 DACA recipients (Wong, CATO).

The Cato Institute estimates that should the federal government force the firing of all DACA recipients, the turnover cost to employers would be $6.3 billion nationwide. Take MM.LaFleur., a technology-enabled retail clothing company based in SoHo that employs approximately 250 people, some of whom are Dreamers. "Losing those employees means we now bear the burden for attracting hiring and training replacements," said Mark O'Neill, the company's chief technology officer, at a recent press conference. "This makes it harder for us to grow our business and slower to create more jobs for Americans."

Another potential cost to companies would be expenses incurred in defending their DACA employees. Microsoft, for instance, has pledged to defend all of its DACA employees, should Congress fail to do so.

That's why we need Congress to pass the Dream Act of 2017, a bipartisan initiative that offers a permanent solution for these Dreamers, the overwhelming majority of whom are productive contributors to their communities and our national economy. Advocacy groups and employers are united in support of the Dream Act as a first step toward comprehensive reform of America's broken immigration policies. Congress should act quickly, in the interests of all Americans.