

What DACA means to me: A Dreamer explains the value of the Obama-era program as it hangs in the balance

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It's 6:30 p.m. on a Friday, and I'm still at work. It's hot, it's humid, and underneath the fluorescent lights in the Financial District, I'm waiting for approval on my last report of the day. Like many of my co-workers, like many in the other towering buildings around me, I'm eager for the weekend.

Despite the long hours, I have no complaints. This is what I worked tooth and nail for growing up in middle-class Richmond Hill, Queens. This is what my parents, who immigrated from India, had intended for me: to have the opportunity to get a degree and find a well-paying job. This is something that someone in my position could only dream about achieving.

This dream was made possible on June 15, 2012, when President Obama implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, through an executive order.

In 2012, I was a 15-year-old high school sophomore who knew little of the consequences of my undocumented status. All I knew was that I had moved to New York City when I was just a year and a half old, along with my mother and older brother, to rejoin my father who was already here.

For the most part, life seemed normal. The only real difference I observed between me and the other kids in school was that many of them would go abroad for their summer vacations, while my family would go on road trips or amusement parks.

In fact, it wasn't until my junior year of high school when I realized what a heavy burden my undocumented status would mean for me and my future. I went from feeling like just another immigrant kid from Queens to someone inferior, someone who thought he had to live under the radar. I started to feel the rights and privileges afforded to everyone else were out of reach.

Enrolling at CUNY Queens College marked a step toward easing my worries and advancing my education. From its diverse student body to the collision of unique perspectives on politics and philosophy.

I joined clubs and made friends from all walks of life, including those who identified as politically and socially conservative, libertarian, moderate, progressive and socialist. These bonds between friends enlightened me on the potential of American compassion when we look beyond our ego, to develop a deeper sense of camaraderie, and understanding in the face of our adversities. It was in these conversations with friends of varying political affiliations that the conviction of doing something meaningful to fix our broken immigration system became apparent.

And today, working at a strategic communications firm in New York City, I've never felt secondary to any of my colleagues because of my status. DACA has given me opportunities beyond anything I could have hoped for. The tension I felt as a 17-year-old who thought that he would never achieve anything because of his immigration status has been alleviated in meaningful ways that are allowing me to achieve an actual stable livelihood.

I am not alone. According to the Institution on Taxation and Economic Policy, in 2017, DACA recipients and those eligible for the program were estimated to potentially contribute up to \$1.7 billion a year in taxes toward local and state governments. Furthermore, the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, estimated that reversing the program would cost the federal government \$92.9 billion in lost federal tax revenue over a 10-year period.

Today, the Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments on the future of the DACA program.

In recent years, hundreds of thousands of other Dreamers like me have waited to see a permanent fix to this problem, but have only seen two political parties consistently fail to reach a middle ground.

Without the protection of DACA, there are limited options for people like myself. While our parents brought us here unlawfully, many of us yearn for the very same dream that millions before us had, even before there were standardized immigration laws. It's not amnesty I'm asking for, it's the standard of rationality and compassion that America was once known for.