

## Congress' DACA replacement debate continues for fourth month

Emma Boggess

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U.S. Congress has yet to find a legislative replacement for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program four months after President Donald Trump's September 2017 announcement to repeal the program.

The repeal of DACA left over 1 million immigrants with an uncertain future. DACA recipients were afforded work authorization and temporary protection from deportation. Their status was renewed every two years if they complied with the law, maintained employment and paid their taxes. The repeal of the program means the loss of protected status. For some recipients, this could be as early as March 2018.

Patrick McHugh, economic analyst for the North Carolina Budget & Tax Center with the N.C. Justice Center, said finding a replacement for DACA is imperative — not just for the immigrants affected but also for the North Carolina economy.

“The economic benefit of a fix for DACA in North Carolina will be maximized if these folks face no impediments to realizing their full potential to gain a complete education and pursue whatever career they're the best fit for,” he said.

Reports from both the Center for American Progress and the CATO Institute estimate a \$1 billion cost to North Carolina per year if legislation is not implemented to replace DACA.

According to a Budget and Tax Center brief from the N.C. Justice Center, the deportation of former DACA recipients will decrease the workforce of growth industries in North Carolina and undermine economic growth.

“Immigrants and children of immigrants are making a contribution to the growth of the labor force and in turn the economy,” the brief reported. “High levels of labor force participation from immigrants and the opportunities to build skills to match employers' needs and pursue entrepreneurial endeavors can strengthen the economy for everyone in our state.”

McHugh said the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act is the simplest and most financially advantageous solution to replace DACA.

“The benefits of a replacement for DACA are to be maximized when it's a relatively clean replacement that does not come with a bunch more enforcement actions,” he said. “The danger here is that if we pair a DACA fix with a whole bunch more draconian enforcement funding, or

with a wall, we're still going to be effectively pushing DACA recipients — even if they have legal status — towards the sidelines of the economy.”

The U.S. Senate and House introduced identical DREAM Acts in July 2017. Democrats and some Republicans are trying to get the DREAM Act passed before Trump's six-month grace period ends. They have tried unsuccessfully to get a DREAM Act passed for 16 years.

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., announced the Solution for Undocumented Children through Careers Employment Education and Defending our nation Act in September 2017 as an alternative to the DREAM Act. The SUCCEED Act is based on four principles — compassion, merit, prevention and fairness — and includes more deterrence of illegal and chain immigration than the DREAM Act, according to a press release from Tillis.

“This act is about the children and it's completely merit-based — if you work hard, follow the law and pay your taxes, you can stay here permanently,” Tillis said in a press conference.

McHugh said while he is glad a DACA replacement is on Tillis' agenda, the SUCCEED Act in its current state is not the best solution.

“The whole benefit of a DACA fix is to bring people into the formal economy, allowing them to pursue education, make themselves the most productive members of our economy they can be and really follow their dreams,” he said. “We're happy to see that this is an issue that Senator Tillis is paying attention to and trying to come up with a legislative fix for, but there are concerns with the initial proposal as written.