

## Trump weighing whether to end protection for 800,000 'Dreamers'

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August 31, 2017

Ciriac Alvarez still remembers the moment five years ago when her mother rushed in with news from Washington that would change her life. Now Ms. Alvarez fears this week will bring another such announcement, only this time it will jeopardize everything she has worked to achieve.

U.S. President Donald Trump is weighing whether to end protections for 800,000 people like Ms. Alvarez who were brought to the country illegally as children. The Obama-era program has shielded such undocumented immigrants from deportation and granted them temporary work permits, allowing them to build careers and families in the only home many of them have ever known.

An announcement on the future of the program could come as soon as Friday, Reuters reported, citing a senior administration official who said Mr. Trump was likely to rescind the protections. If so, it would mark an escalation of his crusade against illegal immigration and set off a political maelstrom. David Plouffe, a former senior adviser to president Barack Obama, recently wrote that ending the program would be an "moral and economic catastrophe."

The program – known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA – was instituted in 2012 and a wide majority of Americans view it favourably. Even Mr. Trump has said that people brought to the country as children were special cases who should be treated "with heart." Since January, he has taken no action to eliminate DACA, despite repeated promises to do so during the campaign.

In June, however, a group of Republican attorneys-general from 10 states threatened to sue the federal government if it did not rescind DACA by Sept. 5. Now Mr. Trump appears on the brink of ending the program in response to that deadline.

For people like Ms. Alvarez, this week represents the culmination of the fears they have carried since Mr. Trump's election last November. Ms. Alvarez, 22, was born in Mexico and arrived in the U.S. at the age of 5. While she was a teenager, a school counsellor told her that she would never attend university because of her undocumented status. But since the advent of DACA, Ms. Alvarez completed high school and became the first person in her extended family to graduate

from college, with a degree in political science and sociology from the University of Utah. Her two elder siblings also have protection under DACA.

Ms. Alvarez said that DACA has been her "chance to keep moving forward in spite of not having documentation." People in her situation are often referred to as "Dreamers" after the name of a piece of legislation – the Dream Act – which was proposed as a permanent solution to their predicament. It never passed, which led Mr. Obama to use his executive authority to institute DACA. To be eligible, undocumented immigrants must have entered the U.S. before mid-2007 and before the age of 16, among other conditions. They are required to renew their protections every two years.

Since DACA was implemented, "my life has taken a 180-degree turn," said Eliana Fernandez, who works as a case manager at the advocacy group Make the Road New York. Getting a work permit allowed her to secure a better-paying job, Ms. Fernandez said. That in turn made it possible for her to return to university and help pay the mortgage on the home where she lives with her husband and two American-born children. Now she is working full-time and also pursuing graduate studies.

"If they have any humanity left in their hearts, they should leave DACA in place," said Ms. Fernandez, 29. Ending DACA would "disrupt the lives of so many people." She described a recent conversation with a client, a mother who hasn't slept in days and came to Ms. Fernandez in tears, full of anxiety about the road ahead for her three children, all of whom are DACA recipients.

Terminating the program would have economic consequences as well. A recent study by Fwd.us, a group established by technology executives to push for immigration reform, found that 30,000 people a month could lose their jobs or be fired as their DACA protections expire. The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, estimated that U.S. economic output would be reduced by \$280-billion (U.S.) over the next decade if DACA recipients were deported.

With Mr. Trump's decision imminent, activists have mobilized to defend the program with demonstrations and petitions. Last week, six Republican members of the House of Representatives wrote a letter to Mr. Trump urging him to maintain the program until a "permanent legislative solution" could be found. Another letter, signed by eight governors and more than 130 mayors, asked Mr. Trump not to take the "senselessly cruel" step of terminating the program.

If Mr. Trump ends DACA, the young people in the program say they will continue to push Congress for a permanent solution, even as they are stripped of the ability to work legally and to live without fear of deportation.

"While I'm anxious, we're going to keep fighting," said Ms. Alvarez, who hopes to attend law school one day. "I'm not going to go back into the shadows."