

# The★Star

## THE KANSAS CITY STAR

### **It is past time to fulfill our promise to the Dreamers**

Natalia Campos

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As a Kansas Citian and a junior studying international relations at Georgetown University, my goal is to be a voice for the voiceless in a society where many feel unheard.

In college, I have gotten to know several Dreamers. They are classmates who were brought to the United States at young ages from all over the world by their parents, who came to our great country looking for a better future for their children. They came here to get away from violence, poverty and other unimaginable hardships. They were trying to let their children have a shot at the American dream.

In 2012, our government implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. It allowed these young people — who have resided in the U. S. continuously since at least 2007, have not committed a serious crime, and are in or have graduated from high school or are serving or honorably discharged from the U. S. military — to be secure from deportation, and to be eligible for work permits and Social Security cards so they can pay taxes. However, they do not qualify for federal programs — including student aid, like I do.

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Last September, President Donald Trump's administration announced that, having determined the program had been put in place without proper authorization, DACA would end this March. At the time, Trump called on Congress to pass legislation to protect these people, whom he has called "incredible kids."

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On Thursday, the United States Senate turned down multiple pieces of legislation that would have impacted Dreamers.

The clock is ticking, and I am very concerned.

One of the Dreamers is my friend Cristina Velasquez. She and her mother fled Venezuela when she was only six. Today, it is not hard to understand why her mother wanted to raise Cristina outside of Venezuela. They originally settled in Madison, Wis., before moving to Miami, Fla. She and I talk a lot about our shared Midwestern values and what those values mean to us.

Anyone would be proud to call Cristina their daughter, friend or student. She graduated at the top of her high school class while also tutoring others. She completed an honors program at Miami Dade Community College, and last December graduated from Georgetown. While in college, she was a teaching fellow, and she was selected to join Teach for America, a program that works to build opportunities in American public schools, including here in Kansas City.

If Congress doesn't pass legislation, Cristina's dream of giving back — possibly even to children here in Kansas City — won't be possible. Without DACA, she will lose her work permit and her ability to help the next generation of young Americans.

The conservative CATO Institute estimates that ending DACA would mean a loss of \$280 billion in economic activity over a decade. Over 10,000 people in Missouri and Kansas have been recipients of DACA protections. Like Cristina, these young people have been vetted and shown to be living exemplary lives — making their own contributions to our nation. They have worked hard to show that achieving our dreams is an essential patch in the quilt that is America.

They go to our schools. They teach our children. They save lives as our first responders and patriotically serve in our military. Being a Dreamer is inherently American.

Sens. Roy Blunt, Claire McCaskill, Jerry Moran and Pat Roberts all voted for the agreement that led to this debate. Let's not let this opportunity be lost.

I urge our senators to come together to find common ground and to protect Cristina and thousands of other Dreamers like her. The clock is ticking. Cristina and thousands of Dreamers are counting on them.