

## Leaders in Law 2017 Nominees: An Uncertain Future: Who are the Dreamers?

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On September 5, 2017, the Trump Administration announced the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Established in 2012, DACA has granted temporary protection from deportation and work authorization to approximately 800,000 individuals – providing hope and a temporary sense of security to undocumented young people commonly referred to as “Dreamers.” However, as evidenced by this announcement, the grant of deferred action can be quickly taken away without notice. Unless Congress enacts legislation in the next six months to allow the Dreamers to lawfully remain and contribute to a workforce already limited in resources, there may be a ripple effect of hardship that will go beyond these 800,000 individuals, affecting families and businesses, and resulting in economic losses estimated in the billions of dollars.

Who are the Dreamers? “Dreamer” is used to refer to individuals who came to the United States as children without proper documentation and were raised and educated in the United States. The name comes from the bipartisan bill, Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, first introduced to Congress in 2001 that proposed a pathway to citizenship for undocumented young people brought to the United States as children. Since 2001, the DREAM Act, or similar bills, have been introduced in Congress no less than 21 times, most recently in 2017. Other bills, such as the Bar Removal of Individuals who Dream and Grow our Economy (BRIDGE) Act, provide very similar protections to DACA. However, these bills failed to be passed by Congress and DACA was issued by Executive Order.

DACA allows the exercise of prosecutorial discretion to focus government enforcement resources away from the Dreamers, who are a low priority population. Department of Homeland Security agencies have used deferred action to prioritize limited enforcement resources on the worst offenders and those who pose a potential national security threat. To qualify for DACA, applicants must satisfy stringent education and moral character requirements and undergo extensive security and background checks. DACA is also limited to a select group of individuals under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 who entered the United States before the age of 16 and satisfied the physical presence requirement.

**A Center for American Progress study estimated that the loss of DACA workers would reduce U.S. gross domestic product by \$433 billion over the next 10 years. The CATO Institute estimated the rescission of DACA would also cost employers \$6.3 billion in employee turnover costs, including recruiting, hiring, and training 720,000 new employees. Moreover, Dreamers pay federal, state, and local taxes and are not eligible for federal welfare. CATO estimates ending DACA could cost nearly \$280 billion in lost tax revenue over the next decade.**