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## ‘Dreamers’ on edge as DACA’s fate uncertain

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Joseline Gonzalez has spent most days this year running through what could happen if President Trump were to shut down a federal program protecting people like her who had entered the U.S. as children and were undocumented.

On Thursday morning, as she walked through San Francisco, she confronted conflicting reports that Trump was likely to roll back the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program within days.

Because of DACA, Gonzalez, a 23-year-old UC Berkeley graduate, has seen her future clearly. She has a job as an outreach coordinator at Catholic Charities of the East Bay, plans to go to law school, land internships and eventually become an attorney.

Those dreams appear muddled at best now, amid difficult options, plaguing anxiety and uncertainty about what could happen next.

It’s a position hundreds of thousands of Californians find themselves in, as the Trump administration appears on the verge of announcing a decision on whether to continue the DACA program. As of the end of March, more than 200,000 people had been initially approved for the program, meaning they could legally work and were protected from deportation.

“You drill into who this population is and it’s primarily young people who have grown in the U.S., their primary language is English, they’ve been educated in our schools,” said Léon Rodríguez, who headed up U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which administers DACA, from 2014 to 2016 under the Obama administration.

Recent polling indicates that many Americans support the Obama-era program. A poll administered by NBC News and Survey Monkey and released this week, for instance, found that 64 percent of Americans backed DACA.

White House officials said Thursday that the program was still under review and that no decision had been made. Earlier in the year, Trump said he would treat so-called “Dreamers” with “heart.” But multiple state attorneys general have threatened a legal challenge to the program by Tuesday if the program is not rolled back by then.

Ken Paxton, the Texas state attorney general, said in a June letter threatening a legal challenge that “DACA unilaterally confers eligibility for work authorization and lawful presence without any statutory authorization from Congress.”

Were DACA to be cut and work permits taken away, those in the program would face dwindling long-term options — perhaps having to go back into the shadows, working in lower-paying jobs that don’t require proof of citizenship — all while being at risk of removal from the country.

“It’s a disaster for communities. It is a disaster for our economy,” Rodríguez said, noting that a loss of hundreds of thousands of workers would cut into job-growth numbers. “Those are people unable to spend, pay taxes — the impact on the economy is in the hundreds of billions of dollars.”

The libertarian Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., found that the fiscal cost of immediately deporting people now in DACA would be more than \$60 billion to the federal government and would cause a \$280 billion reduction in economic growth over the next 10 years.

For Gonzalez, the growing uncertainty has left her feeling like her life is perpetually in limbo.

“Now I have to think about what am I going to do next,” she said, noting she’d probably have to focus less on her dreams and more on just getting by. “I’m going to try to find ways to survive.”

To qualify for DACA, individuals must have come to the country before the age of 16, lived in the U.S. continuously since 2007 and be in school or have graduated. They also must have avoided being convicted of a felony or a significant misdemeanor.

Gonzalez has been in the U.S. since she was a child.

“My whole life is here,” she said. “I can’t go back to Mexico. I don’t have a life there.”

Some days, Gonzalez has no way to avoid thinking of DACA and its future. Clients ask her about it constantly, friends check in to see how she’s doing, she’s on a text message thread with countless others like her sharing the latest news about the program and whether it will survive.

“This is what we think about and talk about all of the time — it’s part of my job, it’s part of who I am,” she said. “It’s exhausting. I wish I could say that I’m a citizen and I don’t have to worry about my status and (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) coming to my home.”

For some, like Gerardo Gomez, a 22-year-old senior at San Francisco State University, the potential loss of the program could lead to serious health issues.

“I’m a gay man and someone who identifies as being HIV-positive — it adds another layer. If I were to lose my health care and be deported to a country where I couldn’t afford my HIV medication, it would literally affect my life,” he said.

Even if he weren’t deported, losing his ability to work would leave Gomez with no reliable income and no way to live in San Francisco.

“Anxious. Empty. And fearful,” he said of his current state of mind.

Prerna Lal, an immigration attorney at UC Berkeley’s Undocumented Student Program, said that students covered by DACA, many of whom are facing graduation with a very uncertain future, had “heightened anxiety” and were under an increasing amount of stress.

Lal said normal beginning-of-the-year stressors, like getting in the right class, were being combined with more existential fears. Some students were changing plans to study abroad, she said, while others were returning to the school before their international programs were set to finish.

But amid all the stress, one student told Lal something that stuck with her. “We used to be undocumented before DACA — we were OK, and we will be OK moving forward, too,” she said the student told her.

“That was a moment of strength for a community that’s been through so much. They are some of the most resilient people I know.”