

## **Clive McFarlane: Dreamers' futures again overshadowed by uncertainty**

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Walter Segura, 29 years old and the father of a 2½-year-old son, is working toward an electrician license. He attends night classes at Worcester Technical High School and is one semester away from finishing his coursework.

After which, he is looking forward to submitting the application for his professional license to the state. The process requires a background check, and until recently, he was confident it would be approved.

He is on the threshold of becoming a licensed tradesman because of the action former President Barack Obama took in 2012 in signing an executive order granting work permits and deportation protection to certain minors who entered the country illegally. The order is known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival, or DACA.

Before that day, Mr. Segura, who came here from El Salvador when he was 15, had toiled in the shadows, working under the table to make a living and being foiled in pursuing his dream of being a media and communication specialist.

A Worcester resident, he was unable to attend the Worcester public schools because his parents were not here to provide authorization papers, he said. And after completing his GED, and enrolling at Quinsigamond Community College, he dropped out in his second semester after lack of a job left him unable to pay the overdue balance of his tuition.

So, he was at the front of the line when some 80,000 of the roughly 1.7 million eligible immigrants signed up for DACA. And he didn't worry much, he said, about giving his personal information to the government and being vetted by Homeland Security.

"It was a great day," he said of President Obama's announcement. "It was the happiest day I ever had. My thinking was 'we don't have nothing, so what else can you lose?'"

That question was answered Tuesday when President Donald Trump announced through his attorney general that the program was being rescinded. This means that in six months some DACA recipients will become eligible for deportation, if Congress does not act to protect them.

"So, I am just one step closer to accomplishing something that I had been working on, and now this," is how Mr. Segura, his eyes tearing, responded to this latest development.

Pablo Larrea, 24, who came here from Ecuador when he was also 15 years old, graduated from Worcester State University with a double major in chemistry and biology, and is currently working as a chemist in the biotechnology field.

He, too, signed up for DACA which allowed him to become eligible for in-state tuition and to get a third job to help pay for his college. More importantly, DACA eliminated his worries about getting a job after college.

He recalled rising as early as 3 a.m. on weekdays, working up until 7 a.m., going to school for a full day, and then working again after school, “in the hopes of having a better life.”

“I wanted to work after graduation, and I took a big chance with the hope I could work and make a career,” Mr. Larrea said.

“One of the things that pushed me into doing so was the promise that the information would not be used against me, and it would be inhumane for the country to now break that promise.”

When DACA was designed, the Obama administration vowed that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services would protect the data from other agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Since his administration’s initial announcement rescinding DACA, President Trump appears to have softened his stance in a tweet that read: “For all of those (DACA) that are concerned about your status during the 6 month period, you have nothing to worry about - No action.”

Mr. Larrea is not comforted by this overture.

“I don’t believe anything he has to say,” he said. “It will be so easy for him to wash his hands and say he tried something. He doesn’t care.”

Mr. Segura is filled with the fear of what comes next.

“It’s getting dark again,” he said.

It is a darkness that covers a world he and Mr. Larrea described as living in little bubbles, with superficial friendships, not knowing who to trust, being circumspect with the information they share, and being susceptible to those who prey on the vulnerable.

And to what end?

Research has shown that DACA participants have seen an increase in wages and labor force engagement of participants, a reduction in the number of households living in poverty, and an improvement in the mental health of their children.

Far from being a drag on the country, DACA participants, according to the CATO Institute, are more like recipients of high skilled (H-1B) visas.

“The majority (of DACA recipients) are still students and 17 percent are pursuing an advanced degree,” the institute noted in a January report.

“By contrast, most recipients of H-1B visas are between 25 and 34 and hold either a Bachelor’s Degree or a Master’s Degree. In short, they appear to be a close reflection of what DACA recipients will look like a few years from now as they complete their educations.”

It boggles the mind that a U.S. president would pardon someone like former sheriff Joe Arpaio of Arizona less than a month after he was convicted of criminal contempt in a racial profiling case, and after the U.S. Justice Department said the sheriff's office had committed the worst patterns of racial profiling the agency had ever seen, but seems hell bent on punishing individuals like Mr. Segura and Mr. Larrea for the sins of their parents.

"My parents sent me over," Mr. Segura recalled.

"It was like a road trip. They said 'you are going to visit your uncle.' It's part of life."