



Democrats push to revive Obama-era aid to illegal immigrants in border talks

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House Democrats are pushing hard to revive an Obama-era program that would keep illegal immigrant families out of detention and instead given them housing, transportation, healthcare, and legal aid to help them claim asylum in the U.S.

President Trump ended the Family Case Management Program in June 2017, citing excessive costs and the low rate of enrolled families returning to their home countries.

House Democrats want to bring it back to life in some form as part of an effort to reduce the detention of illegal immigrants and instead release them in the United States with some supervision. And they are hoping to negotiate that change in the ongoing border security talks between the two parties.

Specifically, Democrats want \$30.5 million added to the family case management budget within the Department of Homeland Security. They also hope family detentions can be phased out this year.

Democrats are hoping to secure the funding in the ongoing talks between 17 House and Senate lawmakers who are trying to hammer out a broad border security agreement by Feb. 15.

[Read more: ['A WALL is a WALL': Trump mocks Congress for talking about fences, barriers](#)]

Democrats will face off next week against Republicans on the negotiating team who are vying for money to boost border security and specifically barriers sought by President Trump along the southwest border, which Democrats oppose.

Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., a top appropriator and a member of the negotiating team, outlined the Democratic proposal with an emphasis on aid to illegal immigrants rather than barriers to prevent entry in into the United States.

“The only crisis at the border has been a humanitarian one due to DHS’ inability to care for the migrants, families, and unaccompanied children properly,” Roybal-Allard said. “My proposal provides a larger investment in alternatives to detention and family case management.”

The Democratic plan calls for 100,000 illegal immigrants to have access to Alternative To Detention programs, up from 82,000 who are allowed to use those programs currently. Pro-immigration advocates have hailed ATD programs, run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as a far more cost-effective and humanitarian way to handle illegal immigration without detention while still ensuring illegal immigrants show up at a later date for immigration court hearings.

The ATD programs work to ensure illegal immigrants show up in court by requiring them to post bond, wear an electronic ankle bracelet, or report to a case manager or community management program.

In addition to the \$30 million for family case management, the House Democratic proposal seeks an additional \$40 million for ATD program case managers, which would add to President Trump's \$184 million overall request to fund the ATD program in fiscal 2019.

Family case management operates within the ATD program but provides more services to illegal immigrants, such as legal help, and is much more expensive, according to the pro-immigration Cato Institute.

Cato's senior immigration policy analyst, Alex Nowrasteh, reported the price tag for some ATD programs is as low as \$24 per day per person. The Family Case Management program cost about \$18,000 per illegal immigrant.

In total, the Family Case Management Program Trump discontinued in 2017 cost \$17.5 million and served 954 illegal immigrants.

"Its cost and small scale make this is an unlikely model for widespread use nationwide but it could be useful in special circumstances," Nowrasteh wrote.

Nowrasteh and those who continue to advocate for the program point to the 100 percent rate of court appearances among families in the program. But the Trump administration did not view the program as a success.

"The rates of compliance for FCMP were consistent with other monitoring options ICE exercises under Alternatives to Detention, which proved to be a much better use of limited resources," an ICE spokesman told the *Washington Examiner*.

According to ICE, more illegal immigrants were sent back to their home countries "at a much higher rate" in other Alternative To Detention programs than the Family Case Management Program.

ICE said more than 2,200 people supervised under ATD programs were eventually sent home, compared with 15 people enrolled in the FCMP that Democrats seek funding for this year.

"We don't have any comment on the pending legislation," the spokesman said.

