

## Dreamers' fate in Trump's hands

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Since coming to this small community from California five years ago, Neyli Castillo has received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, and she has worked as an adjunct professor of economics — all at New Mexico Highlands University. She now works as the assistant to the university's finance director and hopes to earn a Ph.D.

Castillo, 22, whose family illegally immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico more than a decade ago, when she was still a child, has depended on an Obama-era program that allows certain young unauthorized immigrants to receive a Social Security number and a two-year, renewable work permit. Without the program, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, she wouldn't have been able to work at the school legally.

Neyli Castillo, 22, works as the assistant to the finance director at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, N.M. Castillo, a DACA beneficiary, is worried about the future of the program under President Donald Trump. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

She is among thousands of Dreamers, as beneficiaries of DACA are known, whose success stories are now in jeopardy as President Donald Trump considers terminating the program in the face of threats by Texas and other Republican-led states to challenge the program in court if he doesn't act by Tuesday. On Friday, the administration said it will announce Trump's decision by the deadline.

For Castillo, whose current work permit expires in December, the end of the program means she could be uprooted from a career she loves and left vulnerable to deportation from a country she has called home for most of her life.

As a DACA beneficiary, Salvador Suarez Martinez, 28, a clerk at the San Miguel County Courthouse, is among thousands of young immigrants whose success stories are in jeopardy as President Donald Trump considers terminating the program in the face of threats by Texas. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

"I've started from the bottom, and I've come up," she said on a recent day as she sat in a restaurant called Mary Ann's Famous Burritos, a few blocks from campus, with her boyfriend, Salvador Suarez Martinez. "If it ends, it will hurt me," she said, "and it would keep me from succeeding."

Sam Minner Jr., the university's president, wasn't familiar with Castillo's story but nonetheless said he sees great value in what Dreamers like her bring to the school and the country, enough so that he recently penned a letter to Trump urging him not to end or roll back the program.

"I think DACA is not only valuable to the students, but DACA is also valuable to the campus," he said.

The potential end of DACA has cast a cloud of anxiety and uncertainty over immigrants across the country.

“I think for me, to begin with, this is a clear attack on not only the immigrant community but the people of color,” said LuzHilda Campos, 28, of Albuquerque, who is the national deportation defense coordinator for United We Dream, a national advocacy group. She is a Dreamer, as well.

“To me,” Campos said, “this is a clear message that they want us in survival mode and want to send us back to the shadows.”

The DACA program was created by President Barack Obama in 2012. Immigrant activists had put pressure on him to act after Congress had failed to pass an immigration bill that would have created a pathway to citizenship for the estimated 11 unauthorized immigrants in the country.

In the five years since the program was created, 800,000 young immigrants nationwide have been accepted. In New Mexico, about 7,000 people are part of the program.

For many immigrants, the current tension over DACA is just the latest in a series of worries over what they see as a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment sweeping the country — a mood both spurred on and capitalized upon by Trump in his campaign for the presidency. His recent pardon of former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Arizona, a longtime immigration hard-liner, has added to those concerns. Federal judges had found Arpaio guilty of not following court orders to stop enforcing immigration laws after a pattern of racially profiling Hispanics emerged during the sheriff’s saturation patrols.

During his presidential campaign, Trump said he would immediately end DACA once he was in the White House. But since then, he has softened his stance. At one point, he called Dreamers “incredible kids.”

“We are gonna deal with DACA with heart,” Trump said at a news conference earlier this year.

Pressure for him to either rescind or keep the program is building on several fronts. Nine Republican attorneys general, led by Ken Paxton of Texas, sent Trump a letter telling him to end DACA or else they would sue the administration and challenge the program in federal court.

The states argue the program, which Obama instituted through executive order, is unlawful. Texas was among 25 states that successfully sued to stop a planned expansion of the program in 2014 that would have protected another 3.6 million immigrants. Critics of the program have accused Trump of renegeing on his hard-line campaign promises.

Other Republicans, however, have urged him to move with caution. On Friday, U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin became the most high-profile Republican to ask Trump not to cancel the program — at least not until Congress can pass a legislative solution.

Heads of several major companies also have sent Trump a letter urging him not to cancel the program.

“Dreamers are vital to the future of our companies and our economy,” said the letter, which included among its signatories Apple CEO Tim Cook and Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos. “With them, we grow and create jobs. They are part of why we will continue to have a global competitive advantage.”

In a bipartisan effort, two U.S. senators have reintroduced the DREAM Act, which failed in Congress in 2010. The measure would create a pathway to citizenship for many young immigrants already enrolled in DACA.

A number of Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives have sponsored a more conservative measure that wouldn't create an avenue for citizenship but would make the DACA program permanent.

The Democrats in New Mexico's congressional delegation have voiced their support for DACA and have criticized the president for not committing to let the program remain. U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce of Hobbs, the lone Republican in the delegation, recently told *The New Mexican* that DACA is a temporary solution. Congress needs to find a long-term solution, he said.

"We must reform our nation's immigration policies so that the system is fair and just for all," Pearce said in a statement. "The truth is, the current DACA program is a short-term solution that does not achieve these goals. It only provides a temporary fix for millions of young adults who have only ever known the United States as home.

"Since arriving in Congress," he added, "I have fought for immigration reform that provides permanent solutions. Any fix or change for Dreamers must be one that ensures future generations do not face the same challenges and burdens."

U.S. Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat from Albuquerque, met with young immigrants in Albuquerque last week to try to calm their anxiety and reassure them that she would help find a solution.

U.S. Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-N.M., speaks with members of the New Mexico Dream Team, a group of young immigrants, Thursday in Albuquerque. 'Every time I talk with these young people and their families, I am reminded about how valuable they are to our community,' Lujan Grisham said after the event. 'They are not political pawns, despite the president's hateful rhetoric and actions. Immigrant families aspire to be productive members of our communities and provide the same opportunities we all want for our children.' Gabriela Campos/*The New Mexican*

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Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said the program is popular even among Republicans. He said that would make it possible for Congress to pass a legislative solution even if Trump rescinds the program. But Ryan's comments Friday, Nowrasteh said, could put pressure on Trump to not fold the program.

"I think this bodes well," he said. "These have been the strongest statements from a Republican."

If Trump does cancel the program, it most likely would be phased out, meaning immigration officials would not renew or accept further applications for DACA. The last batch of immigrants would lose their work permits in September 2019, Nowrasteh said, and the earliest could be as soon as next month.

He said employers would spend about \$6.2 billion replacing DACA enrollees who are currently employed. The costs include retraining new employees, advertising for the vacant jobs and interviewing candidates.

Of the 800,000 DACA recipients, 91 percent are currently employed, according to a study released Tuesday by the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning think tank, and [FWD.us](http://FWD.us), an immigration reform group started by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

The study, which used data from the Cato Institute, also says that for every business day that DACA renewals are put on hold, an average of more than 1,400 individuals can be fired from their jobs.

Among those whose future seems uncertain is Lizzeth Sandoval, 19, of Las Cruces, who moved there from Phoenix, the seat of Maricopa County where Arpaio was sheriff for 23 years. Her current work permit will expire in August.

Her family moved from the northern Mexico state of Chihuahua to Phoenix, she said, but after strong immigration enforcement there from Arpaio, her family moved to Las Cruces, which they heard was friendlier to immigrants.

Sandoval is working toward a nursing degree at Doña Ana Community College. With her DACA status, she was able to get a job, which helps pay her tuition, she said. If the program ends, she isn't sure how she will foot the bill.

"If they take away DACA, I won't be able to work," she said. "It sucks, honestly."

She fears she could again become a target for deportation, as she and her family were while living in the county where Arpaio was famously known for targeting unauthorized immigrants.

Nowrasteh, the immigration policy analyst, said immigration officials could target DACA enrollees after their work permits expire, but he doesn't think the Trump administration will aggressively pursue them.

"I don't think it's likely they'll be the first ones to be targeted," he said. "DACA kids are sympathetic, they are smart, they organize and culturally they are American. They would cause such a problem to this administration."

Castillo's boyfriend, Suarez Martinez, 28, who moved from New Jersey to Las Vegas, N.M., to attend Highlands University, said the uncertainty surrounding DACA also has been stressful for him.

Suarez Martinez's family emigrated from Mexico to New Jersey 17 years ago. He came to New Mexico because of low-cost tuition at Highlands. After graduating with his bachelor's degree in political science, he began working as a clerk for a state District Court in Las Vegas.

During the interview at Mary Ann's, he said he had recently talked with Castillo about moving to Chicago to continue their education. He wants to go to law school at the University of Chicago.

The potential end of DACA would make that more difficult, he said. But both he and Castillo said that no matter what happens, they will continue to pursue their educations.

“It would be terrible for all of us. It would create fear and pain for my family and me,” Suarez Martinez said. “But nothing will deter me from completing my educational goals.”