

Commentary: Permanent Dreamer solution will safeguard America's future

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The future of America's Dreamers—those brought to our country as children and without legal status—remains in jeopardy.

On Sept. 27, the Biden administration moved to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, recipients from deportation.

The Department of Homeland Security issued a new proposed rule to strengthen and fortify the DACA program in the wake of Judge Andrew Hanen's [ruling](#) finding DACA illegal.

While the DHS rule is welcome news, Congress must act to find a permanent solution for Dreamers.

For many Republicans and Democrats in Congress, the issue of citizenship is perhaps an abstract one. But as the executive director of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, I see firsthand how a hopeful future for our nation's immigrants is threatened by rulings like this, rulings that perpetuate our government's ongoing failure to provide a permanent solution for Dreamers already living and working in America's communities.

More than 100,000 Texan Dreamers—including many within the congregations I serve—currently are able to live and work lawfully in our state because they have been granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

The latest Senate ruling compounds a problem created by a recent court decision from Judge Hanen finding DACA was created illegally. Under Judge Hanen's ruling, new applicants now are halted, and while those who already have DACA can renew for the moment, further court rulings could end the entire program, leaving many without the ability to provide for themselves and their families, and even at risk of deportation to countries of birth that, in many cases, they cannot even remember.

Pro-family, pro-education, pro-economy, pro-faith

Providing a permanent solution for these DACA recipients—and for others brought to the United States as children, but who may not have qualified or applied for DACA yet—is the most pro-family, pro-education, pro-economy and pro-faith step Congress and the president can take on this issue.

That's because, without a permanent legislative solution, all DACA recipients in Texas will be at risk of deportation, creating incredible stress for these members of our community. Were these 100,000 workers actually deported and removed from our state's economy, our labor shortages would be exacerbated and our state's economy would suffer, taking a hit of around \$6 billion a year. Families would face the likelihood of losing fathers, mothers, breadwinners and caregivers.

The more likely scenario is the federal government would not prioritize these individuals for deportation, but they would lose their work authorization, forcing people either to be idle or to work unlawfully, often in careers beneath their skill set in sectors of our economy more willing to look the other way to employ someone unlawfully.

Furthermore, tax contributions almost certainly would decline. And, most importantly, we'd be squandering the potential of these young people, each

of whom is made in God's image with gifts and talents they are eager to offer for the good of our communities, our state and our nation.

For years, our churches have challenged our students to "love the Lord their God with all their mind." The sacrifice and effort to raise educated, responsible and productive students is hampered by the failure of a legislative solution for Dreamers. The lives of students working on college degrees are in limbo. Along with their employers, those who have graduated and are working face economic instability due to an unsure future.

Facing the future

You don't have to know a Dreamer or have one in your church to be affected. The education of the next generation of Texans will be affected when we lose the 2,000 teachers in the DACA program. In the middle of a raging pandemic with many healthcare systems on the brink, does the country want to get rid of the more than 60,000 DACA-eligible health care workers?

And what of the \$241 million in local and state taxes Dreamers contribute to our schools and infrastructure? Or the \$850 million in state and federal taxes Dreamers contribute?

These issues are not theoretical or statistical for church leaders in Texas. We see the turmoil in children. We see families who can't come to church together for fear of deportation. We see the upheaval in the community.

These numbers represent people who are integral parts of our congregations: church members, Sunday school teachers, students, employees and community leaders—and yes, even seminary-trained pastors—who are facing very real fears for the future if Congress does not act.

Fortunately, there's still one more bipartisan solution on the table. Senators Lindsey Graham and Dick Durbin have introduced a Dream Act that would allow these young people to earn citizenship. The House of Representatives already has passed legislation that includes these provisions. We just need the U.S. Senate to take up the bill.

We can make it happen, but we need leadership in the U.S. Senate, particularly from Texas' senior U.S. Senator John Cornyn, whose position as the ranking member on the Senate's immigration subcommittee and seniority within the Senate give him the influence to ensure this bill passes.

If you want to strengthen families, promote education, maintain a strong economy and assimilate immigrants, pass a permanent Dreamer solution now.

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