

# What is DACA and who are the Dreamers?

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Word Count **1,126**

Level **1060L**



A woman holds up a sign in support of the Obama administration program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, during an immigration reform rally on August 15, 2017, at the White House in Washington, D.C.. Photo by: AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

The Trump administration announced September 5 that it planned to end DACA. The program had given temporary protection to immigrants who arrived in the U.S. illegally as children.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the U.S. would end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in March 2018. The U.S. attorney general is the top law enforcement officer in the U.S. The decision to end DACA threw almost 800,000 people into confusion and fear.



After this announcement, Congress was given up to six months to find another law to address these immigrants, also known as Dreamers.

There has been a pushback from Democrats. Some Democratic leaders said they had agreed on a new deal with Donald Trump to protect Dreamers. Trump recently told reporters, "We're working on a plan for DACA."

So what is DACA, who are the people affected, and what will happen to them?

## **What is DACA?**

DACA is a federal government program created in 2012 under Barack Obama. It allows people who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children the temporary right to live, study and work in America.

These Dreamers must apply for this right. They are checked for any criminal history or threat to national security, and they must be students or have completed school or military service. If they pass this checkup, they can avoid being deported, or sent home, for two years, and will be able to apply again. They can try to obtain a driving license, college enrollment or a work permit.

## **Who are the Dreamers?**

By the time Trump announced his decision to stop the program, 787,580 Dreamers had been granted approval. To apply, they must have been younger than 31 on June 15, 2012, when the program began. They also must be "undocumented," meaning they are not legally on record as official immigrants.

To be a Dreamer, one must have arrived in the U.S. before turning 16 and lived here continuously since June 2007.

Most Dreamers are from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the largest numbers live in California, Texas, Florida and New York. They range in age from 15 to 36, according to the White House.



## Why are they called Dreamers?



In 2001, both Democrats and Republicans came together to create the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. It would have offered those who had arrived illegally as children the chance of permanent legal residency. However, the law failed to pass. So, Obama's administration created the DACA program as a temporary measure to protect the Dreamers.

## What did Trump announce?

During last year's divisive election, Trump promised to end DACA immediately. He said he would work to deport the estimated 11 million people who are in the U.S. illegally.

Trump also threatened to ban all Muslims from entering the U.S. and to build a wall along the border with Mexico. He has not yet successfully carried out any of these threats.

The administration announced September 5 that it would begin ending DACA. Trump gave Congress six months to come up with a law for Dreamers.

Obama used his power as the president, also known as an executive order, to make the DACA program. Executive orders do not require approval from the Senate or Congress.

Since he became president, Trump had the power simply to reverse Obama's order.

### **What will happen to the Dreamers?**

Under the Trump administration, DACA applications will no longer be accepted.

For those currently in the program, their legal status and permits to work and attend college will end as early as March 2018. All Dreamers will lose their legal standing by March 2020. However, Congress may pass laws allowing a new way for them to become legal immigrants.

As their legal standing expires, they could be deported and sent back to the countries where they were born, which they may have no familiarity with. It is still unclear whether this will happen.

### **What has Trump said about Dreamers?**

On the campaign trail in 2016, Trump said his administration would "immediately terminate" President Obama's executive orders, which they called "illegal." One of these orders was DACA.

In a speech in August 2016, with U.S. citizens struggling to make ends meet, Trump indirectly criticized people benefiting from DACA. "We want our children to be Dreamers, too," he said.

After becoming president, Trump said he wanted to "work something out" for Dreamers. On the day the end of DACA was announced, he said he told the Department of Homeland Security that DACA recipients will not be actively pursued "unless they are criminals, are involved in criminal activity, or are members of a gang."

### **Why were Republican state attorneys general suing Trump over DACA?**

Trump did not cancel DACA when he took office. Soon, Republican state leaders who are against immigration tried to force him to do it. They said that DACA is against the U.S. Constitution, and Dreamers are illegal and threaten American jobs and culture.

Ken Paxton, the attorney general of Texas, threatened to sue the federal government. He said he would go ahead with the lawsuit if the government didn't cancel DACA by September 5. A state attorney general is the top law enforcement officer of a state.

That letter was also signed by the attorneys general of Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. Tennessee then changed its mind and supported DACA.

**Which states announced plans to sue Trump over his decision to rescind DACA?**

After Sessions announced the decision to remove DACA, 15 states and Washington, D.C. announced a lawsuit of their own against the Trump administration. Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said Trump's decision to end DACA was "outrageous" and "not right."

The states in the lawsuit are Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia and Washington. California announced its own lawsuit.

**Who supports DACA?**

Most Democratic politicians support DACA. It also seems that the majority of national politicians in the Republican party did not want Trump to scrap DACA. That group included House Speaker Paul Ryan and Arizona Senator John McCain. A prominent group of Christian religious leaders wrote to Trump last month telling him that Dreamers "are leading in our churches and our communities."