



Memo: President Barack Obama

From: Rep. Raul M. Grijalva and Rep. Keith Ellison, co-chairs Congressional Progressive Caucus

Date: November 12, 2014

Subject: A Strong Executive Order for a Strong America

Introduction

The Congressional Progressive Caucus calls on President Obama to provide comprehensive relief to immigrants residing in our nation through executive action. Expansive and robust action that addresses the economic, family, community and national problems we now face is urgently needed. Republicans in Congress have made it clear they will not engage in a good faith effort to fix our broken immigration system. The president has the legal authority and moral imperative to provide relief for over 7 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the shadows.

Our current deportation system is inhumane and wastes billions of taxpayer dollars. Choices between addressing the needs of millions of aspiring Americans and attempting to satisfy the demands of an uncompromising and entrenched opposition are inevitable. We should stand for what is right for our nation. This memo contains our requests for a new affirmative relief program and an expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

The administration should act swiftly and comprehensively. We should not force deserving individuals and families to wait any longer.

New Relief Process for Immigrants Residing in the United States

The executive branch has the authority to establish a separate affirmative process that is similar and parallel to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The program should take into consideration those aspiring citizens who have contributed to their communities and have established a strong work history, regardless of familial ties. Immigrants have deep ties to their communities in numerous ways – opportunities for relief should not exclude individuals who lack formal familial ties, such as many LGBT immigrants and parents of DREAMers.

Fixing our broken immigration system will benefit our economy and allow us to use our national security resources more wisely. Affirmative relief can begin a path towards many of the same benefits of passing comprehensive immigration reform, including: increased GDP, decreasing budget deficits and a more productive labor force that will raise real wages for all Americans. Rather than asking our local and national security forces to spend time and resources on deporting law-abiding citizens, our country can concentrate on the real threats we face today. A

new program with benefits similar to DACA could go a long way towards solving our deportation crisis and meeting the needs immigrants and their families:

Categories for relief in a new program should include:

1. Individuals eligible for relief under S.744;
2. Parents, siblings, and spouses of citizens, lawful permanent resident (LPR) holders, and individuals eligible for DACA;
3. Individuals who have resided in the country for three or more years;
4. Individuals who are “regularly employed,” including agricultural and seasonal workers;
5. Individuals that entered the country after the age of 18 but satisfy the DACA educational requirement.

According to Migration Policy Institute, creating eligibility for parents or spouses of U.S. citizens, LPRs or DACA-eligible individuals could provide needed relief for around 4 million individuals.

WHO WE CAN HELP WITH A NEW RELIEF PROGRAM



Meet Angie Celis – dental school applicant, 26 years old

Angie Celis is the oldest of three siblings in a Guatemalan-American household of five. Angie was 2 years old when her mother brought her to the U.S. to meet with her father. A graduate of U.C.L.A.'s master's program in oral biology, Angie is now applying to dental school.

Two years ago, Angie received immigration relief through the DACA program.

Angie's parents are proficient in English, which helps them at work as a housekeeper and yacht maintenance technician respectively. Both parents are undocumented. Angie's brother, 23, is U.S.-born, graduated from UC Santa Cruz, and teaches kindergarten. The youngest sibling, 7, is also U.S.-born.

"Although my options have multiplied since getting DACA, the chances for my parents to step out of the shadows remain limited. My dad's business in yacht maintenance has helped our family stay well fed and looking to the future with hope. My mom's tireless work as a household worker has been an inspiration for all since childhood. With Administrative Relief, my father's business could grow bigger and he would hire more workers to help him. He would finally drive and his commute would be shorter than the 2½ hours it takes from him get to Marina Del Rey from Canoga Park using public transportation.

"As to my mom, Administrative Relief would help her seek a less stressful job, return to school, and make her dream of getting a high school diploma come true."

Adapted from <http://www.chirla.org/node/310>

Expand Eligibility for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

DACA has given beneficiaries temporary relief, increasing economic opportunities and contributing to our growing economy. While millions could benefit from this program, DACA's restrictive eligibility requirements exclude a substantial amount of individuals who are contributing and successful members of communities around the country. Many of these individuals arrived here as children and know America as their one and only home. Research finds DACA participants to be more integrated into the nation's economic and social institutions because they have access to employment opportunities, bank accounts, credit cards, and healthcare.¹ Simple modifications could expand and strengthen the program:

Categories for expansion should include:

1. Eliminate barriers in educational requirements;
2. Eliminate the upper and lower age limits;
3. Raise the age-at-entry requirement to under 18 years of age;
4. Expand grants of deferred action and employment authorization to four years;
5. Change the cut-off date requirement to September 1, 2012;
6. Change the continuous presence requirement to look back two-years; and
7. Provide an option for individuals to apply for advance parole concurrently with an initial or renewal request.

According to Migration Policy Institute, eliminating the maximum age, changing age-at-entry, changing year of arrival to 2011, *and* eliminating the education requirement could provide much needed relief for around 3 million individuals.

WHO WE CAN HELP WITH A DACA EXPANSION



Meet Carla Mena and Karla Salgado

Carla Mena moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, from Peru in 2001, when she was 11. A few years later in 2009, 13-year-old Karla Salgado arrived in Raleigh from Mexico. Both girls rapidly adapted and excelled in their classes.

As graduation approached, the young women, each an outstanding student, faced the same barrier: they could not afford the high out-of-state tuition at public universities and they were ineligible for financial aid as undocumented immigrants. Both girls had big dreams that were in danger of being crushed because of their immigration status. Luckily, both girls found a small school in Raleigh called Meredith College that sees the potential in all young women and welcomes a diverse student body. Carla graduated from Meredith in 2012 with a degree in biology and Karla started there last month declaring a biology major.

But here is where their stories diverge. Because Carla came to the United States earlier than Karla, she is eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In contrast, Karla arrived in the United States in 2009, missing the deadline for DACA by two years. Her dream is to become a nurse anesthetist. But without a work permit, Karla's future is very uncertain and her contributions to America will be limited.

"My status has broken my dream into pieces. I have worked hard to get where I am. I have scholarships to college but it will be in vain because I won't be eligible to work when I get out. Please don't tear my dreams apart. It's not about politics. A piece of paper can change everything."

Adapted from: <http://blog.nclr.org/tag/hanging-in-the-balance/>

Conclusion

The Congressional Progressive Caucus thanks President Obama for his commitment to broad and meaningful immigration reform. We remain a ready and willing partner for the administration as it proceeds with executive action. Our proposal delivers on the president's commitment to the American people, allowing over 7 million people to step out of the shadows and take their place in American society. In the process, our economy will reap the benefits of a boosted GDP, shrinking deficits, and a more productive labor force that in turn raises wages for all Americans. We agree that it is past time for Republican leadership to take action on this issue. We are committed to working on a bipartisan legislative solution that will codify your executive order into law.

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ⁱ Robert G. Gonzales & Angie M. Bautista-Chavez, "Two Years and Counting: Assessing the Growing Power of DACA," http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/two_years_and_counting_assessing_the_growing_power_of_daca_final.pdf