

How 'dreamers' are preparing in case Trump ends Obama immigration actions

USA TODAY NETWORK Daniel González, The Arizona Republic 7:50 p.m. ET Jan. 23, 2017



(Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

PHOENIX · Judith Jimenez was already house hunting when Donald Trump won the presidential election in November. She decided to [go ahead and buy anyway](http://azc.cc/2iQEY8F) (<http://azc.cc/2iQEY8F>).

Now she risks losing the house, and everything else she has worked for, if President Trump reverses [Barack Obama's](#) executive actions on immigration.

"It would definitely put a stop to our dreams, for now," said Jimenez, 35, a Phoenix resident whose parents brought her from [Mexico City](#) to the U.S. when she was 11. "But I guess we would do what all immigrants have done throughout history, which is try to survive."

[Wary U.S.-Mexico border residents watch Trump take office](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/01/20/wary-us-mexico-border-residents-watch-trump-take-office/96872112/)
(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/01/20/wary-us-mexico-border-residents-watch-trump-take-office/96872112/>)

Surviving won't be easy.

Ending Obama's immigration actions would revoke work permits and deportation deferrals for Jimenez and more than 752,000 other young people approved for Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. That means Jimenez would no longer be able to work legally in the U.S.

If that happens, Jimenez, a dental assistant, said it will be a struggle to afford the \$830 monthly mortgage payment on the \$144,000 house she bought at the end of November for her and her 12-year-old son.

After being on a waiting list for nearly two years, Jimenez said she was recently accepted to enroll in the dental hygienist program at Phoenix College. But if she loses her work permit, she said she likely also won't be able to afford the tuition, not only because she won't be able to earn a living legally, but also because she would no longer qualify for in-state tuition under Arizona law.

On top of that, she would have to worry again about being deported back to Mexico, even though she grew up in the U.S.

Losing deferred action "would just mess up everything," she said.

Undoing Obama's executive actions

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Trump had promised to roll back many of Obama's executive actions on his first day in office, including the controversial Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Trump has called the program unconstitutional, and critics have labeled it a form of amnesty.

Preparing for Trump's immigration actions

Trump was sworn in as president on Friday. It's possible he could direct his administration to end the program anytime.

He would have two options for ending the program, said Stephen Yale-Loehr, a law professor at [Cornell University](#).

[Cubans amass at Mexico-Texas border after 'wet foot/dry foot' change](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/01/19/cubans-texas-border-wet-foot-dry-foot/96770142/)
(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/01/19/cubans-texas-border-wet-foot-dry-foot/96770142/>)

The least bureaucratic and most lenient would allow people who have received work permits through the program to use them until the permits expire and not let them renew them, he said.

Or he could end the program immediately. But under immigration regulations, that would likely require sending termination notices to all 752,000 people who have received work permits through DACA and giving them 15 days to reply, he said.

"It would take some time to implement whatever decision President Trump takes," Yale-Loehr said.

In anticipation of losing their work permits, some "dreamers" are trying to save as much money as they can. Others are looking into going into business for themselves. Still others are looking into moving to Canada, or another country where they will be able to continue their careers. Many also said they would have to resort to finding jobs with employers willing to pay them off the books.

Advocacy groups plan to pressure Trump to keep the program, and are planning protests if it ends.

"I know that the only way personally to move our community forward is to speak up and continue telling our stories," said Juan Escalante, 27, who has

deferred action. He is digital campaigns manager at America's Voice, a national organization that pushes for comprehensive immigration reform. "We are not going into hiding."

Eliminating the program would help satisfy supporters who voted for Trump because of his campaign promise to bring back American jobs and crack down on illegal immigration.



President Donald Trump, flanked by Vice President Mike Pence and Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, signs his first executive order on health care Friday in the Oval Office. Dreamers are worried about Trump undoing former President Obama's deportation deferment. (Photo: Evan Vucci/Associated Press)

At the same time, he could further alienate many Latinos already turned off by Trump's campaign comments about Mexicans and undocumented immigrants, as well as Americans who sympathize with the plight of so-called dreamers who came to the U.S. through no fault of their own and for all intents and purposes are Americans.

A survey of 1,308 people (<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/10/18/146290/new-study-of-daca-beneficiaries-shows-positive-economic-and-educational-outcomes/>) with work permits through the DACA program found their hourly wages increased 42%, which translated to higher income tax contributions, which benefits all Americans, according to the [Center for American Progress](#), a liberal think tank.

Through higher wages, people with work permits through DACA have been able to buy cars, homes, and start new businesses, which increases tax revenue to cities and states, the center said. Eliminating the program would "wipe away" \$433.4 billion from the U.S. gross domestic product cumulatively over 10 years, the center calculated in a separate study.

Possible help from Republicans?

In his *Time* "Person of the Year" interview published in December (<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2016-donald-trump/?iid=buttonrecirc>), Trump showed some sympathy for dreamers, saying, "We're going to work something out that's going to make people happy and proud."

"They got brought here at a very young age, they've worked here, they've gone to school here. Some were good students. Some have wonderful jobs. And they're in never-never land because they don't know what's going to happen," Trump told *Time*.

White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus told [Fox News Sunday](#) that Trump may hold off on ending the deferments. "I think we're going to work with House and Senate leadership as well to get a long-term solution on that issue," he said.

In anticipation of Trump ending the DACA program, Sens. [Lindsey Graham](#), R-S.C., and [Dick Durbin](#), D-Ill., have introduced a bill that unlike Obama's executive action would protect dreamers from deportation through legislation passed by Congress. Like DACA, the bill would provide temporary relief from deportation and work permits to undocumented immigrants who qualify.

Sen. [Jeff Flake](#), R-Ariz., meanwhile, has unveiled his own bill to extend deportation protections to dreamers, coupled with tighter enforcement for immigrants who commit major crimes. Flake thinks his bill would have a better shot at getting through the Republican-controlled Congress.

Obama's administration created the program in June 2012 as he was ramping up his campaign to run for a second term as president, saying the policy was needed because Congress had failed to pass comprehensive immigration reforms addressing what to do about the nation's 11.3 million undocumented immigrants.

Through September, 752,154 people nationally have been approved for the program, and of those, 588,151 have been approved for two-year renewals, according to [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#).

In Arizona, 27,211 people have been approved for the program, the sixth-highest number of any state behind California (216,060), Texas (120,642), Illinois (41,256), New York (38,340) and Florida (30,364), according to USCIS.

In Tennessee, Dennis Ramos, a 26-year-old house painter and remodeler, said he's seriously considering moving out of the country with his younger brothers, possibly to Canada, if Trump ends DACA. He and his 22-year-old brother are covered under the DACA program, while the youngest brother, 13, is a U.S. citizen.



Members of the Ramos family posed for a portrait outside their home in Memphis shortly before the parents' departure in 2015. From left, front: Isaias Ramos, Cristina Vargas and Dustin Ramos. Back row, from left: Mario Ramos and Dennis Ramos. (Photo: Daniel Connolly/Memphis Commercial Appeal)

"I think that's a very likely possibility and that would mean we will become undocumented again," Ramos told the USA TODAY Network in a Memphis interview also published by [Public Radio International](#). "And that would mean life would get harder again."

They're particularly interested in Canada because it's a developed country. They could transport their vehicles and equipment overland. And Ramos had also seen discussion on Facebook about Canada's recent decision to lift its visa requirement for Mexicans, making it easier for them to enter the country.

Their immigrant parents returned to Hidalgo state in Mexico on their own in 2015 for personal reasons. If the brothers earned legal status in Canada, they could travel easily to Mexico to visit their parents, something that's hard for them to do today without special permission.

In a worst-case scenario, the government would come after them, he said.

"We have ideas and we have dreams, and they're not likely to happen anytime soon in this country. So now we're looking at our options. Whether it's here, or in Europe, or even back in Mexico."

Making alternate plans

With her work permit, Genesis Egurrola, 23, a Phoenix resident, works as a legal assistant, earning money to take classes at Phoenix College. Her family brought her from [Nogales, Sonora](#), to the U.S. when she was 4. She eventually wants to attend law school but that goal would be derailed if Trump ends the program, she said.

"I would probably lose my chance to work and go to school," Egurrola said.

After Trump was elected in November, Juan Rodriguez, a 24-year-old Mesa resident, began saving as much money as he can in case Trump ends the DACA program.

At the time, he was considering buying a house and had even been approved for a mortgage, but decided it would not be a good idea to take on more debt. He already has a \$400-a-month car payment on the 2013 Charger he bought with money he earns as a fraud analyst for a payment processing company.

"I knew that it would have been a risk if Trump won," said Rodriguez, who also studies criminal justice at Mesa Community College. "He promised that he would get rid of DACA, and if he did that, I would have a tough time. It would mean that I would lose my job and I wouldn't be financially stable anymore."

After being approved for DACA in December 2012, Alely Ponce-Moreno, a 22-year-old Mesa resident, got a job as a restaurant hostess, and then later at two different call centers. A graduate of [Dobson High School](#) in Mesa, she has lived in the U.S. since she was 4 months old, when her parents brought her to the U.S. from the state of [Coahuila](#) in Mexico.



Genesis Egurrola, 23, a Phoenix resident, works as a legal assistant, earning money to take classes at Phoenix College. Her family brought her from Nogales, Sonora to the U.S. when she was 4. (Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

With the money she earns working full time, she is able to cover tuition, which is about \$10,000 a semester, at [Grand Canyon University](#).

She plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree in business in April.

If Trump ends the program, she plans to earn as much money as she can before her work permit expires so she can finish her degree.

"I would put in as much overtime as I could. Also, I would try and get another job to accumulate as much money as I could," she said.

She is exploring the possibility of using her degree and opening her own business to earn money, if she loses her work permit.

Jimenez, the Phoenix resident who bought a house in November, said she knew she was taking a risk after Trump won the election. [Hillary Clinton](#) had promised to keep Obama's immigration action in place and even expand them.



DACA recipient Judith Jimenez bought a house in Phoenix at the end of November for her and U.S.-born son Max Rumbo. Now she worries what will happen if President Donald Trump ends former President Barack Obama's immigration actions. (Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

But she decided to buy the house anyway.

"Our lives have to continue," she said. "We can't just stop and see what is going to happen."

If Trump ends the DACA program, she said she will probably try find a job somewhere that allows her to work illegally without a permit.

That won't be easy in a state like Arizona, where employers are required to use E-Verify, a federal online electronic program, to check the employment status of every worker they hire. But she guesses many other dreamers will do the same.

"We find ways to work but it's not fun," she said. "You just take any job you can. You can't complain. You can't really look for something you like to do or want to do. You look for something to survive to pay your bills."

Contributing: [Daniel Connolly](#), *The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal*. Follow Daniel González on Twitter: [@azdangonzalez](#)

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