

COALITION *for the*
AMERICAN DREAM

May 8, 2024

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member, Committee on the
Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and Members of the Committee on the Judiciary:

We submit the following statement for the record regarding the topic of today's hearing, "Dream Deferred: The Urgent Need to Protect Immigrant Youth."

The Coalition for the American Dream is an organization of business leaders representing every major sector of the U.S. economy and more than half of American private sector workers. Our more than 100 top companies and trade associations also proudly employ thousands of Dreamers who were brought to this country as children and raised as Americans.

Today's hearing comes just one month before the twelve-year anniversary of the creation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. When the program was created, it was intended to provide urgent—yet temporary—relief for Dreamers, those undocumented immigrants who came to the United States at a young age and were at risk of suffering serious economic and personal harms because of their lack of immigration status. Leaders in both parties at the time seemed committed to providing a bipartisan permanent legislative solution, but failed to reach one.

Over the past twelve years, DACA granted many of these young people some reprieve by allowing them the opportunity to come forward, register with the government, and secure legal work authorization to support themselves and their families. Perhaps just as importantly, the deferral of removal provided DACA

recipients with the peace of mind that helped hundreds of thousands of people to pursue their dreams without the fear that their lives could be upended at a moment's notice. Many DACA recipients attended college, began their careers, or built their families, all of which has had a positive impact on the American economy and society.

Research shows that almost all (94%) current DACA recipients have graduated from high school and nearly half (47%) have some higher education. More than a third are married and have children. And the vast majority are currently in the labor force (79%), contributing an estimated \$13.3 billion to GDP each year.

About 300,000 current DACA recipients are employed in industries facing labor shortages.¹

Today, Dreamers live and work all across America. They are serving our communities as teachers, nurses, and first responders. They have stepped up to protect our country by joining the United States Armed Forces, or, like one of your witnesses today, protecting our communities by serving in law enforcement. Our companies and organizations are incredibly proud to employ DACA recipients, who have played important roles in our economic recovery and growth in recent years.

Unfortunately, we are reminded of the negative consequences of congressional inaction every time a young person is told that they are ineligible for DACA under the current rules, and each time a DACA recipient must file to renew their protections.

At its height, DACA protected more than 800,000 people. Today, the DACA protected population has shrunk to roughly 530,000 people.² Some DACA recipients have been able to access the legal immigration system and secure an enduring legal status. Many others have not been so fortunate.

¹ FWD.us, "DACA 11 Years Later: From students to careers and families," June 2023, <https://www.fwd.us/news/daca-anniversary>.

² United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Count of Active DACA Recipients By Month of Current DACA Expiration As of December 31, 2023," March 2024, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/active_daca_recipients_fy2024_q1.xlsx.

In total, experts estimate that there are as many as three million Dreamers living in the U.S.³ The population of unprotected young people, including those who came after the program's eligibility cut-off date (which has never been updated), as well as those whose applications cannot be processed because of court orders, continues to grow. More than 100,000 undocumented young people will graduate from high school this year with no way to access DACA.⁴

It is clear that DACA's time is running out. The Supreme Court could rule as early as this year on the legality of the program. There is a significant chance that those who are currently protected by the program may no longer be able to extend their benefits. They will be forced to quit their jobs, and their families will face the threat of deportation and separation. Their futures will, once again, be placed in jeopardy.

Allowing DACA to end without creating other legal options for the program's beneficiaries would be seriously harmful to our companies, and our country. Nearly 1,000 people would be forced to leave the workforce *each and every business day for two years*.⁵

That's one thousand people a day, every day for two years.

That's hundreds of workers in education, healthcare, construction, food preparation, and finance, lost every day.... month after month.

DACA was never meant to be a permanent solution, and congress should have acted a decade ago to provide a better pathway, but they have not. You have not.

³ Migration Policy Institute, "A Deeper Look at the DREAMers Who Could Feature in the Legalization Debate in Congress," February 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/dreamers-who-could-feature-legalization-debate>.

⁴ FWD.us, "The Post-DACA Generation is Here: Nearly all this year's 120,000 undocumented new high school graduates are ineligible for the policy," May 2023, <https://www.fwd.us/news/undocumented-high-school-graduates>.

⁵ FWD.us, "What happens if DACA ends," May 2024, <https://www.fwd.us/news/what-if-daca-ends>.

With the real possibility of DACA ending without any other options for the vast majority of Dreamers, the need for bipartisan leadership and action on this issue is as real and urgent as it has ever been.

The American public, including majorities of Republican and Democratic voters, continue to be in favor of a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers.⁶ **It is popular policy, it is the right thing to do, and it will make our immigration system, our economy, and every one of our communities stronger and better.**

There continues to be a real opportunity to break through the partisan gridlock on this issue. The Chair and Ranking Member of this committee have introduced legislation⁷ that would provide Dreamers an opportunity to clarify their legal status and pursue the American Dream in the country they have called home for many years. We applaud and appreciate their leadership on this issue, but the time for further action is past due. We urge the Members of this committee to act swiftly to advance critically needed bipartisan legislation that will provide a permanent solution.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for this hearing. We thank you for holding it. If you or your staff would like any further information, please contact press@coalitionfortheamericandream.us.

⁶ Impact Research / Public Opinion Strategies, "Findings from Recent Nationwide Immigration Polling," October 2022, <https://www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FWD.US-NATIONWIDE-IMMIGRATION-POLL-FINDINGS-MEMO-10.26.22.pdf>.