

September 7, 2017

Dear Legislator:

This week's DACA announcement from the Trump Administration was devastating. As you know, over 1,200 DACA recipients live in Rhode Island and are directly affected by this action.

On the positive side, our entire Congressional delegation supports passage of the DREAM Act, which would codify the DACA program into law. Its fate in our current dysfunctional Congress remains uncertain, however. So while it is critical that Congress act to fill the calamitous void left by the repeal of President Obama's executive order, state and local officials also have an essential role to play in the meantime to protect those victimized by this inhumane action. We are writing to ask you to take on that responsibility.

We have been heartened by the many strong condemnations of the President's actions from legislators, mayors and others. **But more than condemnation is needed; now is the time for action.** In that spirit, we believe there are specific, concrete things YOU can do to help protect Rhode Island's vulnerable DACA recipients.

As a legislator, there are three bills pending in the General Assembly that you could pass – as soon as your September 19th session – to help protect DACA students in Rhode Island:

1. H-6021 would generally bar schools and other “sensitive locations” from allowing ICE agents access to their facilities without a warrant. Passage of this bill would provide DACA students at least some limited protection from the roundups that have been happening elsewhere.

2. H-5237 would treat DACA recipients as Rhode Island residents and provide them financial relief in attending the state's public colleges and universities, allowing them to continue their education even as their legal status remains in limbo. While this is currently an administrative policy, it is critical that it be codified into law in light of the climate we are now living in. We can't condemn President Trump for refusing to treat DACA recipients as Americans if we refuse to treat them as Rhode Islanders.

3. S-183 and H-5686 would provide special driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. While we recognize passage of this bill in its current form is not realistic, an amended version that authorizes licenses for DACA recipients could be enacted. Their DACA status has given them the right to drive, but when their status expires, so will this right, further upending their lives. The state can prevent this from happening through the passage of focused legislation based on these pending bills.

The Trump Administration's actions have only exacerbated the day-to-day fear and dread that already exists among the immigrant community. Therefore, if you are as appalled as we are at the federal Administration's cruel actions against these innocent DACA recipients, we ask you to demonstrate your concern by taking the concrete steps cited above to protect them from the mean-spirited and heavy hand of the federal government.

As we have said, the time has now come for action, not just words. You have the opportunity to help, and we hope you will take advantage of it. (Since a ramp-up of ICE raids across the country began a few months ago, community organizations have also been in touch with Governor Raimondo, Attorney General Kilmartin and Chief Justice Suttell, asking them to take actions within their independent purview to protect immigrants in our state.)

Our groups look forward to hearing back from you about this and learning of your efforts to protect the state's vulnerable DACA population, and thereby keep Rhode Island a welcoming state for the immigrants, past and present, among us. We all stand ready to assist you in promoting this important cause. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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