

Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries

How Will Executive Actions by President Obama Affect Those In and Served by Our Disciples of Christ Communities?



(Stories from Tapestry Ministry's Mustard Seed Project for Immigration with the Oakland Peace Center, provided by immigration lawyer Peggy Bristol-Wright. For further information, contact RIM Director, Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea at ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org.)

President Obama's latest Executive Actions will include, among other things, eligibility for Deferred Action to certain parents of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents who have been in the U.S. over 5 years. It will also expand the current DACA program to include young adults who were excluded before because they were too old or entered after 2007. Also, the immigration courts will be able to reduce the currently overwhelming backlog of cases by closing low-priority cases. Additional relief for crime victims and victims of human trafficking will be provided.

Individuals Who May Be Positively Impacted Include:

- The mother of a young girl from El Salvador who was at risk of being kidnapped, tortured, raped and killed because she had rejected the advances of an MS-13 gang member. The girl had moved to the home of more than one relative in the vain hope of escaping from the gang, but their relentless network always tracked her down. She knew their threats were real because one of her friends in a similar situation was later found floating in a nearby canal. This teenager was also approved for SIJS and now has her green card, so her mother would now be eligible for Deferred Action for Adults.
- The quiet, yet gracious undocumented parents of three children who were granted asylum last month, in part because the children had witnessed the violent murder of a neighbor in El Salvador by a known gang member. The family was so afraid of gang retribution reaching them in this country that they were initially afraid to tell their story even to those who could help them. The children will be eligible for lawful resident status in 2015, and the parents will then be able to apply for Deferred Action for Adults.
- An undocumented couple in their fifties who endured a 12-year legal nightmare in immigration court because they hired an ineffective immigration attorney who landed them in deportation proceedings instead of helping them get work permits as promised. A negotiated settlement with the government's attorney administratively closed their removal proceedings but gave them no legal status. This couple has lived and worked in the U.S. for a good 20 years, paying taxes the entire time. They have two daughters who are U.S. citizens and one daughter who has her green card. Deferred Action for Adults will finally allow them to have legal status in this country.
- The baby from Honduras, just short of his first birthday, who went to immigration court last month. He smiled and gurgled as he sat on his mother's lap in front of the judge, with absolutely no idea what was going on around him. He kept diving into my briefcase, but just to try eat my files and my pen. I think the court can safely say his is a low priority case and his deportation proceedings should be closed despite the government's objections.

Individuals Who May Be Excluded Include:

- The 70-year old senior who labored in California fields as an agricultural worker, paid his taxes, sent money home to Mexico, and for twenty years paid into the Social Security system, but cannot receive a dime of his Social Security benefits unless he can produce proof of legal status in this country--or unless he returns to Mexico. He has three adult sons, but all are undocumented.
- The undocumented aunt, whose nephew was abused and neglected by his mother in El Salvador and arrived in country with his clothes hanging off him because he had been so underfed. The aunt is the only real parent this child has ever known. She supports him as he applies for SIJS, but when he does get his green card she may not be in any better position than she is right now, despite all her ferocious love and care.