

Among young immigrants, applications for deportation relief have slowed

By [Tara Bahrapour](#), Published: November 27

After President Obama won a second term, the staff at CARECEN, a Washington-based Latino community organization, braced for a flood of applicants for [“deferred action for childhood arrivals”](#) (DACA), a new Obama administration policy that allows some illegal immigrants who came to the United States as children to get two-year work permits and a deferral of deportation proceedings.

As many as 1.7 million people are potentially eligible, but only about 264,000 applied between August, when the government began accepting applications, and the end of October. Some held back, saying they feared that a Republican president would rescind the policy and use the information on their applications to locate and deport them.

But even though Obama won, the hordes of applicants have not materialized. In fact, according to numbers released Nov. 16 by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the average number of applications has waned, from a peak of 5,715 a day in September to 4,527 a day in November.

“It’s actually slowed down here at CARECEN,” said Andrea Rodriguez, the group’s director of legal services, adding that the organization will cancel an application workshop that was planned for Saturday.

In September, she said, people were lining up early in the morning for services, and some had to be turned away. But at a recent intake session, only one person showed up.

Other immigrant-advocacy groups in the Washington area, such as Casa de Maryland and Ayuda, have also reported either a leveling or a falling off of applications since the election — possibly because so many local youths raced to apply in August and September, as soon as they could.

“I think the first wave of people we helped were really activists,” said George Escobar, director of health and human services at Casa, which has not seen a rise in applicants at its DACA clinic since the election. “They weren’t afraid to come out and defend their right to be in this country.”

For many, especially families with several eligible children, the \$465 application fee is a deterrent. “It’s real common for people to space their kids out by one year, so it’s the family making individual decisions as to who they’re going to support,” Escobar said.

Others may not know that they are eligible. Or they may be too afraid to fill out the application, which [asks for information](#) that in effect requires people to admit, using their real names and addresses, that they are in the country illegally.

“There are still concerns about the information and what could happen to the information down the line,” said Shiu-Ming Cheer, a lawyer at the National Immigration Law Center in Los Angeles.

Almost 309,000 applications had been filed as of Nov. 16, and 53,000 had been approved, with an unknown number sent back with requests for more information. Approval can take several months.

In the Washington area, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people are eligible.

Muzaffar Chishti, director of the Migration Policy Institute’s office at the New York University School of Law, said it is probably too early to identify significant trends in applications for DACA. He noted that there is no deadline to apply and that applications are likely to drop off during the holiday season.

“People who were sitting on the fence to see if [Mitt] Romney won are obviously relieved, but also there is some optimism in the air that there might be a legislative fix,” he said. “So some people may be holding out to see if they get something better.”

That could mean some version of the Dream Act, a bill that would provide a path to legal status for immigrants who arrived here as children and met certain conditions.

The bill did not pass the Senate two years ago, but after an election in which [Hispanics overwhelmingly supported Obama](#), many Republicans have acknowledged the need to appeal to immigrants. On Tuesday, three Senate Republicans [introduced a proposal](#) with some features that are similar to the Dream Act.

According to the government figures, the highest numbers of DACA applications have come from California, followed by Texas and New York. Virginia is 10th on the list. And although nationwide the numbers have not risen since the election, those applying now include many who were reluctant to do so before knowing the vote’s outcome.

In some places with fewer immigrants, local advocates say they have seen a spike.

“In the Deep South, we do have pretty stiff anti-immigrant laws,” said Hiroko Kusuda, an assistant clinic professor at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law.

Before the election, she added, she advised eligible youths in Louisiana and Mississippi to hold off on applying for DACA. “I always told them, ‘You know, I wouldn’t do it now,’ because I wasn’t sure if the new president, if it’s not Obama, would continue this program.”

Now, she said, she is advising them to go ahead — in part because Obama won, and in part because since Romney lost, “Republicans have changed their minds; they have decided that immigrants are a very important part of their constituency.”

Since the election, Kusuda said, her clients' faces have brightened. "They are more at ease," she said.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/among-young-immigrants-applications-for-deportation-relief-have-slowed/2012/11/27/fdd2e7e6-3425-11e2-bfd5-e202b6d7b501_story.html