

Arizona Dream Act supporters ready for legal battle against state services ban

State governor Jan Brewer signed executive order contradicting Obama's plan to benefit young undocumented migrants

[Matt Williams](#) in New York

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Immigrant rights groups are gearing up for a legal and political fight in [Arizona](#) after the state's hardline Republican governor issued an order that bans young immigrants, spared deportation under a new federal initiative, from getting driver's licences and other state benefits.

Jan Brewer, the state governor, is determined to curtail the rights of people in her state who qualify for the new rules, which give young undocumented migrants the right to work and spares them from the threat of deportation.

The Referred Action for Childhood Arrivals scheme, which came into force on Wednesday, is expected to benefit more than one million people under 30 who can prove they arrived in the [United States](#) before they turned 16.

Tens of thousands of undocumented youths have thronged to information events held across the United States in the past two days hoping to benefit from an executive order issued by [Barack Obama](#) that gives them the right to work and spares them from the threat of deportation.

But in Arizona, as many immigrants in the state celebrated their newfound eligibility for a reprieve from the threat of deportation, Brewer signed an executive order on Wednesday directing state agencies to deprive them of ID cards, such as driver's licences, and healthcare benefits.

The edict stated that "allowing more than an estimated 80,000 Deferred Action recipients improper access to state and local public benefits" would have "significant and lasting impacts on the Arizona budget its healthcare system and additional public benefits that Arizona taxpayers fund".

As such, she ordered that "the issuance of Deferred Action employment authorisation documents to unlawfully present aliens does not confer upon them any lawful or authorised status and does now entitle them to any additional public benefit".

A spokesman for Brewer told the Arizona Republic that the executive order was designed to clarify that the new federal guidelines do not give lawful status to individuals eligible under the scheme.

But campaign groups said the decision to make the order on a day when hundreds of thousands of young people were celebrating was mean-spirited and smacked of politicking. "She has stuck her nose in for political reasons and has become the skunk at the garden party," said Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice, an advocacy group promoting immigration reform.

The federal scheme is open to undocumented immigrants under the age of 30 who can prove they arrived in the United States before they turned 16. Those living in the country at least five years and are in school, have graduated or served in the military can apply for work permits. The initiative is designed to help hundreds of thousands of young people on the way to citizenship. Obama signed the order earlier this year after the [Dream Act](#), which he supports, stalled in Congress.

Many of those left frustrated by the Brewer's counter-measure descended on the state capitol on Wednesday in protest against the executive order. Local [reports suggest that up to 200 people took part in the protest](#), organised by the Arizona Dream Act Coalition.

Advocacy groups are preparing for a possible courtroom battle against the executive order. "There will no doubt be a battle fought on legal grounds as well as legislative and political," Sharry said.

As the order came into force on Wednesday, huge crowds flocked to events designed to give information to potential applicants. Forms must be submitted by mail, and there is no appeal from rejected applications, so it is important that those who wish to record their status get their documents in order.

In Chicago, some 13,000 people lined up for a workshop led by immigrant rights advocates on how to file the paperwork for their new status. It was a similar scene in Los Angeles. "It's something I have been waiting for since I was two years old," said Bupendra Ram, a 25-year-old communications graduate student in Fullerton, California: "This offers us an opportunity to fulfill the dreams I've had since I was a child."

Of the one million people expected to file an application under the first year of the new guidelines, the department of homeland security estimates about 890,000 will be eligible.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/16/arizona-dream-act-jan-brewer>