

DHS: Shield against deportation can be extended

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WASHINGTON — Young immigrants who have won government protection from deportation can apply for another two years of safety.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will start taking renewal applications from the more than half-million immigrants already enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program starting immediately.

Renewal applications are being sought now to ensure that immigrants already in the program don't fall out of status, Alejandro Mayorkas, the deputy secretary of the Homeland Security Department, said Wednesday. Renewals, like new applications, carry a \$465 fee. The program remains open for first-time applicants.

DACA, as the program has come to be known in immigration circles, was launched in advance of the 2012 presidential elections and the first applications were approved in September of that year. Since then, more than 560,000 immigrants who arrived in the United States as children but didn't have legal status have been given permission to legally stay for two years.

Mayorkas announced the renewal program in the midst of President Barack Obama's latest push to get Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration bill in advance of November's midterm elections. Last month the White House announced that a Homeland Security-led review of deportation policies would be put on hold until the end of the summer.

The delay is aimed at giving Congress time to act on immigration before the August recess.

DACA was hailed by immigration advocates as a good interim fix to a larger problem of what to do with the more than 11 million immigrants thought to be living in the country illegally. Since the program's launch, those advocates have pushed Obama to do more for a larger group of immigrants.

DACA is open to immigrants who came to the United States before they were 16 years old, were younger than 31 on June 15, 2012, and had been in the country since at least June 15, 2007, and have no criminal history. They also must be in school, have graduated from high school or earned a GED certificate or served in the military.

Republican lawmakers have derided the program as "backdoor amnesty."

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