

Napolitano says 200K illegal immigrants have applied for deferred deportation

By Jordy Yager - 10/24/12 05:15 PM ET

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said on Wednesday that more than 3,000 young illegal immigrants are applying for deferred deportation every day under the administration's new immigration policy.

About 200,000 young people in the country illegally have applied to defer their deportation for at least two years and get a temporary work permit since the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began accepting applications under the new rules two months ago, according to Napolitano.

Napolitano made that announcement in Washington on Wednesday to a panel of educators from around the country who serve on the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council. Several members of the panel — including Antonio R. Flores, the president of Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities — lauded the administration's policy change.

She announced earlier this year that DHS would be focusing its resources on deporting the most serious criminals who are in the country illegally. The policy change — which came in an election year in which President Obama is fighting hard for the Latino vote — allows people under the age of 31 who came to the country illegally before they were 16 to apply for a permit to stay in the country for a two-year, renewable period.

To be eligible, an illegal immigrant must have lived in the United States for the past five years. They must be attending school or have received an equivalency diploma, graduated from high school, or been honorably discharged from the military. And they must not be a felon or have been convicted of more than two misdemeanor crimes.

Flores said that some Hispanics hoping to take advantage of the new rules are cautious, fearing that they will not fit the requirements and the government will deport them or their families.

Napolitano said her department has been updating its website with answers to questions that could come up for applicants during the process, and said she expects an increase in applications after the election. Each application takes at least 4 months to process, during which time the applicant will not be deported from the country, said Napolitano.

"I suspect that we may see a bulge of applications after the New Year when there's either this administration or a new administration and when the policies are going to become more clear," Napolitano told the group.

GOP nominee Mitt Romney has criticized the administration's deportation policy, but earlier this month said he would not revoke permits granted under the program if he wins the White House. He says his plan for comprehensive immigration reform would make the deferred action program unnecessary.

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