

Obama Administration to Stop Deporting some Young Illegal Immigrants

Houston Chronicle

By Susan Carroll

Friday, June 15, 2012

The Obama administration on Friday announced plans to stop deporting and start offering work permits to hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants brought to the U.S. as children as long as they have stayed out of trouble with the law.

The policy change announced by [Homeland Security](#) Secretary [Janet Napolitano](#) will offer an estimated 800,000 undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. under age 16 and meet certain criteria the opportunity to apply for deferred action, protection from deportation that would last for two years and could be renewed. Those whose applications are approved also would be eligible to apply for work permits, authorities said.

In order for immigrants to be eligible:

They must have come to the U.S. before age 16.

They must be younger than 30.

They must have lived in the U.S. for the past five years.

They must be enrolled in school, graduated from high school, obtained a GED or be an honorable discharge veteran.

They also must show they do not have any felony convictions or multiple misdemeanors.

The announcement comes as the Obama administration has faced mounting criticism from Hispanic groups for deporting record-setting numbers of illegal immigrants, and for what critics called disappointing results of its review of hundreds of thousands of cases pending on the nation's overcrowded immigration court dockets.

While the announcement was widely praised by immigrant advocates, Republicans reacted swiftly and angrily, accusing the Obama administration of doing an end-run around Congress.

"President Obama's decision to grant amnesty to potentially millions of illegal immigrants is a breach of faith with the American people," said U.S. Rep. [Lamar Smith](#), R-Texas. "It also blatantly ignores the rule of law that is the foundation of our democracy."

"This grant of deferred action is not immunity," Napolitano said. "It is not amnesty. It is an exercise of discretion so these young people are not in the removal system."

Thousands of children brought to the U.S. during the illegal immigration boom years have come of age and are graduating from colleges only to end up in limbo, unable to enter the workforce.

Many pinned their hopes on the DREAM Act, legislation that would have offered legal status to illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. as children or teens provided they stayed in school and out of trouble. That legislation has failed year after year, despite bipartisan support.

While the "deferred action" will not give undocumented immigrants a path toward permanent legal residency or citizenship, many embraced the news because it would offer them a chance at a work permit.

"Sometimes we have to take baby steps," said [Jose Luis Zelaya](#), an illegal immigrant from Honduras who crossed the border illegally at age 14 to join his mother in Houston. The 25-year-old Texas A&M graduate said he started crying as soon as he heard the news and called his mother.

"It's just amazing," he said.

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