

# Obama, Citing a Concern for Families, Orders a Review of Deportations

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WASHINGTON — [President Obama](#) said Thursday that deportations of illegal immigrants should be more humane, and to make that happen, he has ordered a review of his administration's enforcement efforts.

Mr. Obama revealed the effort in an Oval Office meeting with Hispanic lawmakers on Thursday afternoon, telling them that he had "deep concern about the pain too many families feel from the separation that comes from our broken immigration system," according to a White House statement.

Representative Luis V. Gutiérrez, Democrat of Illinois, said afterward that it was "clear that the pleas from the community got through to the president." He added that he and his two colleagues at the meeting — Representative Rubén Hinojosa, Democrat of Texas, and Representative Xavier Becerra, Democrat of California — "were adamant that the president needed to act."

Mr. Obama — who told the lawmakers that he had ordered Jeh C. Johnson, the secretary of Homeland Security, to conduct the evaluation — is under increasing pressure from Latino advocates to all but suspend aggressive efforts to deport illegal immigrants. Activists and Hispanic lawmakers say the government is ripping families apart by deporting people whose only crime was coming to the country illegally. Some groups said Thursday that a review by Mr. Johnson would not go far enough.

"Relief delayed is relief denied," said Pablo Alvarado, the director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network. "The president has no excuse to continue his unjust deportation policy."

Many Republican officials have said they already do not trust Mr. Obama to adequately enforce the security of the nation's borders, and early reaction to his new order was sharp.

"Fifty million working-age Americans in this country don't have jobs," said Stephen Miller, communications director for Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of Alabama. "And what does the president do? He takes more steps that would provide companies with illegal workers."

More illegal immigrants have been deported during the Obama administration than under any previous president, officials have said. Within weeks, the government is likely to have deported two million immigrants during Mr. Obama's six years in office, a milestone that has intensified anger among some Hispanics.

The issue could be a critical one in midterm elections this year for Democratic candidates, many of whom rely on Latinos to turn out and vote for them in big numbers.

But any effort to pull back on deportations could threaten to undermine longer-term hopes for bipartisan legislation to overhaul the immigration system. In the past several months, Mr. Obama and top advisers have repeatedly told activists that the president's hands are tied by laws that require him to spend millions of dollars in an effort to eject people who have crossed into the country without the proper papers.

During a November speech, [Mr. Obama responded to a heckler](#) who shouted that the president had "a power to stop deportation for all undocumented immigrants in this country."

Mr. Obama responded, "Actually, I don't."

White House officials said late Thursday that the president would not suspend deportations because his advisers did not believe such a move would be legal. He also will not [expand his 2012 order to defer deportations](#) of illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as young children, aides said.

But activists have refused to back down. Janet Murguía, who leads the National Council of La Raza, said last week that Mr. Obama was the "deporter in chief" and accused his administration of leaving "a wake of devastation for families across America."

Privately, top Obama aides have expressed frustration at the push from Hispanic activists that the president act unilaterally to stop deportations. But the pressure has moved in recent weeks from fringe activists to the mainstream. Last week, Senator Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey, a leading Latino voice in Congress, called on Mr. Obama to do something drastic.

"While we continue waiting for the House of Representatives to wake up and move on immigration reform legislation, I urge the president to take action today and halt needless deportations that are splitting apart our families and communities," he said.

On Tuesday, aides to four Democratic senators, including Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, met with Kathryn Ruemmler, the White House counsel, to discuss how the president could curb the number of deportations, perhaps by exempting the parents of children who were brought to the United States when they were very young, according to two people familiar with the meeting.

White House officials said that Mr. Obama would meet on Friday with activists from a number of Latino organizations to further discuss legislation to overhaul immigration and to hear their concerns about deportations.

Angela Kelley, the vice president for immigration policy at the Center for American Progress, said that activists also understood the importance of keeping up pressure on Republicans in the House, who have refused to consider a bipartisan Senate bill to overhaul immigration.

"Make no mistake," she said. "It is the Republicans who are responsible for the fact that we don't have reform today."

In the meantime, Ms. Kelley said, she and other advocates for illegal immigrants were looking to Mr. Obama to slow the record number of deportations. She noted that more than 5,000 American children are in foster homes because one or both parents have been deported.

“We have reached a crisis point,” Ms. Kelley said.

“The question is,” she added, “which end of Pennsylvania Avenue” will fix the problem.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/us/obama-orders-review-of-deportations.html>