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U.S. to Stop Deporting Some Illegal Immigrants

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WASHINGTON — Hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came to the United States as children will be able to obtain work permits and be safe from deportation under a new policy announced on Friday by the Obama administration.

The policy, effective immediately, will apply to people who are currently under 30 years old, who arrived in the country before they turned 16 and have lived in the United States for five years. They must also have no criminal record, and have earned a high school diploma, remained in school or served in the military.

These qualifications resemble in some ways those of the so-called Dream Act, [a measure blocked by Congress in 2010](#) that was geared to establish a path toward citizenship for certain young illegal immigrants. The administration's action on Friday, which stops deportations but does not offer citizenship, is being undertaken by executive order and does not require legislation. It was announced by the Department of Homeland Security.

What the younger immigrants will obtain, officials said, is the ability to apply for a two-year "deferred action" that effectively removes the threat of deportation for up to two years, with repeated extensions. "This is not immunity, it is not amnesty," said Janet Napolitano, the homeland security secretary. "It is an exercise of discretion."

Officials estimated that the new policy would cover about 800,000 people.

People whose deferrals are approved will then be able to apply for work permits, which will be dealt with case by case, an official said.

Details were first reported by The Associated Press.

President Obama was expected to discuss the new policy in the White House Rose Garden Friday afternoon. The plan is expected to be popular among immigrant citizens, especially Hispanics, a key voting bloc in the upcoming elections. But it is likely to provoke some political dispute as well.

And as a matter of executive power, officials said, it could be reversed by a future administration's fiat.

Since people who come forward would not obtain permanent lawful status, and the policy might be changed, it is uncertain whether they will flood to the immigration service in the months ahead as the application process opens up.

"People can make their own decisions about whether or not their circumstances warrant coming forward," an official said. The main incentive to do so, she said, was that it would make it easier to obtain a work permit.

Ms. Napolitano said that it made no sense to focus immigration enforcement on people who pose little if any threat to the nation.

"Our nation's immigration laws must be enforced in a firm and sensible manner," said Ms. Napolitano, the homeland security secretary. "But they are not designed to be blindly enforced without consideration given to the individual circumstances of each case. Nor are they designed to remove productive young people to countries where they may not have lived or even speak the language. Discretion, which is used in so many other areas, is especially justified here."

In its announcement, the Department of Homeland Security said it "continues to focus its enforcement resources on the removal of individuals who pose a national security or public safety risk, including immigrants convicted of crimes, violent criminals, felons, and repeat immigration law offenders. Today's action further enhances the Department's ability to focus on these priority removals."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/us/us-to-stop-deporting-some-illegal-immigrants.html>