What Obama's delay on executive action means for immigrant families

Sep 9, 2014
By Griselda Nevarez

For Seleste Wisniewski and her four children, President Barack Obama's decision to postpone executive action on immigration until after the November elections could have real consequences. It could mean her husband will be deported to Mexico in the next few days.

Wisniewski's husband, Pedro Hernandez Ramirez, was notified last week that his one-year reprieve from deportation won't be extended for another year. His attorney has asked immigration officials to reconsider their decision but has little hope that Hernandez will be allowed to stay.

"The only thing I'm asking for help is to stay with my family," Hernandez said in a conference call with reporters Tuesday. "I don't want to be separated from them. They need me and I need them."

Hernandez has been living in the United States for more than a decade. He is the primary caretaker of his biological son and of Wisniewski's three U.S. citizen children, including her 24-year-old son who has cerebral palsy. The family lives in Ohio.

Wisniewski, who is a U.S. citizen, said she and her children were hoping Obama would take executive action to protect her husband and other undocumented immigrants with strong ties to the U.S. from deportation.

But when she learned on Saturday that Obama would not act on immigration until after the midterm elections instead of at the end of the summer like he had promised, she said she couldn't comprehend the president's decision to delay action. "Why is he going to wait to keep families together?" Wisniewski said.

The human cost of Obama's delay

In a conference call with reporters on Tuesday, immigration advocates pointed to Hernandez's story as a way to highlight the "real human costs" of Obama's decision to delay executive action on immigration.

"As an advocate working with Latino communities in the small towns of northern Ohio, I can tell you that the lack of action on immigration from both Congress and the administration has created a disaster with a very real and devastating human toll, particularly on American children who are being impacted by the loss of a parent by the tens of thousands," Veronica Dahlberg, executive director of HOLA Ohio, told reporters. "We are in a state of emergency."

Marinela Martinez Magana, a 27-year-old mother of three U.S. citizen children from Ohio, is another undocumented immigrant who is facing immediate deportation and was counting on Obama to act on immigration.

According to her attorney, Martinez doesn't have a criminal history and has been living in the U.S. for more than a decade. She left El Salvador in 2004 when her family began to receive death threats. She was put in deportation proceedings last month when she appeared in court to pay for a minor traffic ticket.

Nerry Diaz, Martinez longtime partner and father to their three children, said in the call with reporters on Tuesday that Martinez's deportation would have a devastating effect on him and their children.

"It's going to be very hard for us to be separated," Diaz said. "We just don't know what to do. It's a very hard situation. I just wish the president would do something."

But for other families, like that of 9-year-old Ana Garcia, the president's executive action on immigration will come too late. Garcia's father was deported to Guatemala three years ago. He was put in deportation proceedings after he got in a car accident.

"It makes me feel sad," Garcia told VOXXI, describing how she felt to be separated from her father. "I want Obama to bring my dad home."

Garcia was among a group of children who traveled from Florida to Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to share their stories of how their parents have been deported or are currently in deportation proceedings. Organizers of the event said Obama's decision to delay executive action on immigration will especially impact children whose parents will be deported between now and the time the president acts.

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