

Testimony of Senator Dick Durbin
Hearing on “Protecting Dreamers and TPS Recipients”
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
March 6, 2019

Chairman Nadler, Subcommittee Chair Lofgren, Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing and thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony.

I also want to thank Representatives Roybal-Allard, Velázquez and Clark for their leadership in introducing H.R. 6, the Dream and Promise Act of 2019.

I am honored to serve as the Ranking Member of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee. As the proud son of an immigrant, I believe that immigration makes America great. The need to ensure that our immigration laws are worthy of our heritage as a nation of immigrants has never been greater. Though our bipartisan efforts to fix our broken immigration system have been blocked time and again, we must continue fighting for a fairer and more humane system.

The Dream Act & DACA

Nineteen years ago, I first introduced the Dream Act, bipartisan legislation that would give young immigrants who grew up in this country a path to citizenship. For the last several years, I have come to the floor of the Senate more than 100 times to tell the stories of Dreamers. A study by the Center for American Progress found that passing the Dream Act would add at least \$281 billion and as much as \$1 trillion to the American economy in just one decade. In my home state of Illinois, passage of the Dream Act would add up to \$4 billion per year to our state’s GDP.

In 2010, a Republican colleague and I were the first members of Congress to call for the establishment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) to protect Dreamers from deportation. DACA has been a huge success. More than 800,000 Dreamers have come forward and received DACA, which has allowed them to contribute more fully to their country. Illinois is home to more DACA recipients than any state except California, Texas, and New York. DACA has unleashed the full potential of Dreamers, who are contributing to our country as soldiers, engineers, teachers, small business owners, and civil rights advocates.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

In 2013, I was a member of the “Gang of Eight” – four Democrats and four Republicans – who authored comprehensive immigration reform legislation that passed the Senate on a strong bipartisan vote of 68-32 in 2013. This bill would have strengthened border security, provided a path to citizenship for Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, and millions of other immigrants with deep roots in this country; established new protections for American workers; and cleared the backlog of legal immigrants who have been waiting for years for green cards. Unfortunately, the Republicans who then controlled the House of Representatives refused to even give our bill a vote. If they had, it would have passed by an overwhelming bipartisan vote and become the law of the land.

President Trump’s DACA and TPS Crises

On September 5, 2017, the Trump Administration announced its repeal of DACA. Hundreds of thousands of Dreamers faced losing their work permits and being deported to countries they barely remember. The Administration has also terminated TPS for more than 300,000 TPS recipients, which jeopardizes not only their safety, but also that of their American-citizen children, who number in the hundreds of thousands.

This Administration created this threat to more than one million Dreamers and TPS beneficiaries, and then attempted to use these vulnerable individuals as bargaining chips to advance the Administration's anti-immigrant agenda. When he announced the repeal of DACA, President Trump called on Congress to "legalize DACA." But since then, he has rejected numerous bipartisan deals to protect Dreamers.

Last year, I crafted a bipartisan agreement that included the Dream Act and a path to citizenship for TPS recipients. However, President Trump rejected my legislation in a tense meeting in the Oval Office.

Instead, the President tried to put his entire hardline immigration agenda on the backs of the Dreamers. He said he would only support legalization for Dreamers if Congress passed his plan, which would, among other things, slash legal immigration by more than 40 percent, the largest cut in immigration in almost a century. However, the Senate rejected this plan by a bipartisan supermajority.

Conclusion

It would be an American tragedy to deport Dreamers and TPS recipients who have so much to contribute to our country.

President Trump created these crises. But instead of working towards a solution, he has sabotaged every effort to save the Dreamers and TPS recipients.

Congress must disregard the Administration's views and come together on a bipartisan basis to offer a path to citizenship to Dreamers and TPS recipients. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House and Senate to make this legislation the law of the land.