

# The Benefits of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) on Immigrants in Michigan

## INTRODUCTION

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy was initially established in 2012 by President Barack Obama in an effort to address the needs of young undocumented immigrants who arrived to the country as minors. DACA provides temporary protection from deportation and work authorization (applicants must apply for renewal after two years), and has led to an increase in employment opportunities and participation in higher education among many beneficiaries.

step in addressing our outdated immigration system. The recent termination of the DACA program threatens the livelihood and well-being of these young undocumented immigrants and their families, and this in turn threatens our economy and the well-being of our state.

**Unless there is action in Congress or by President Donald Trump’s administration, all 689,800 DACA beneficiaries across the U.S. will lose their work permits and be subject to deportation over the next two years as their permits expire.** In Michigan, 5,400 young immigrants currently enrolled in the program stand to lose their status. This report describes the many ways in which young undocumented immigrants help strengthen our state, the positive impact that DACA has had on their lives, and recommendations that policymakers can take to ensure their well-being as well as that of their families.

### Snapshot of DACA Enrollees

**793,026**

Total number of individuals who have participated in the DACA program.

**689,800**

Approximate number of individuals currently enrolled in the DACA program in the U.S.

**5,400**

Estimate of individuals currently enrolled in the DACA program who reside in Michigan.

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS)

## BACKGROUND: WHO ARE THE DREAMERS?

The term “Dreamers” was coined in 2001 to describe young immigrants who would benefit from the passage of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, a bill offering a pathway to citizenship for young undocumented immigrants who were brought to this country as young children by their parents. **Today, “Dreamers” is used more broadly to describe all young immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as kids and identify as Americans in every sense of the word, but do not have legal status.** In 2012, the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program granted temporary reprieve from deportation

In the five years since its inception, DACA has proven to be an effective strategy for boosting beneficiaries’ wages, employment opportunities and education. While there are several shortcomings to this policy, DACA was a good first

and a renewable two-year work permit to Dreamers who met age and education requirements (hold a high school diploma or GED), and passed a background check. By opening the doors to legal employment without the fear of deportation, DACA became a vital policy for enabling this group of young immigrants to succeed in this country. Researchers and recent data on beneficiaries confirm that the DACA program enabled many participants to pursue educational and professional dreams, contribute to their family's household income and make their first big purchases such as buying a car or a home.<sup>1</sup>

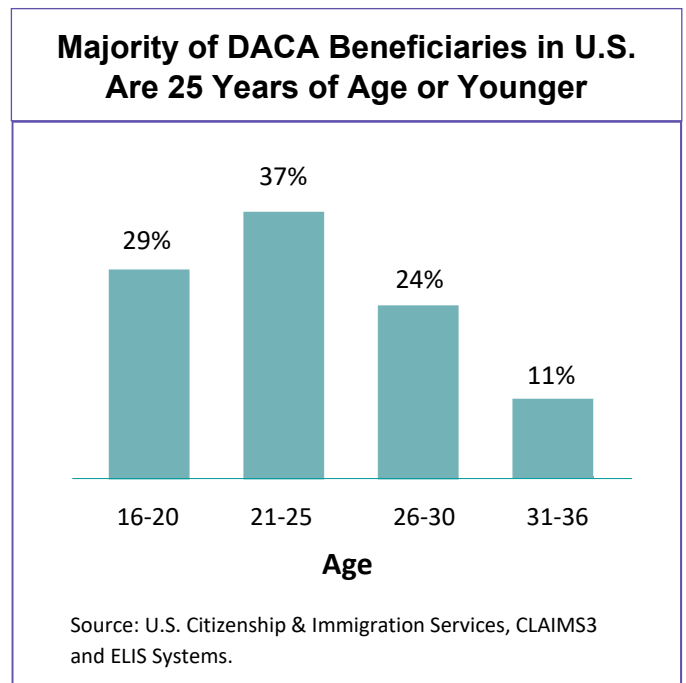
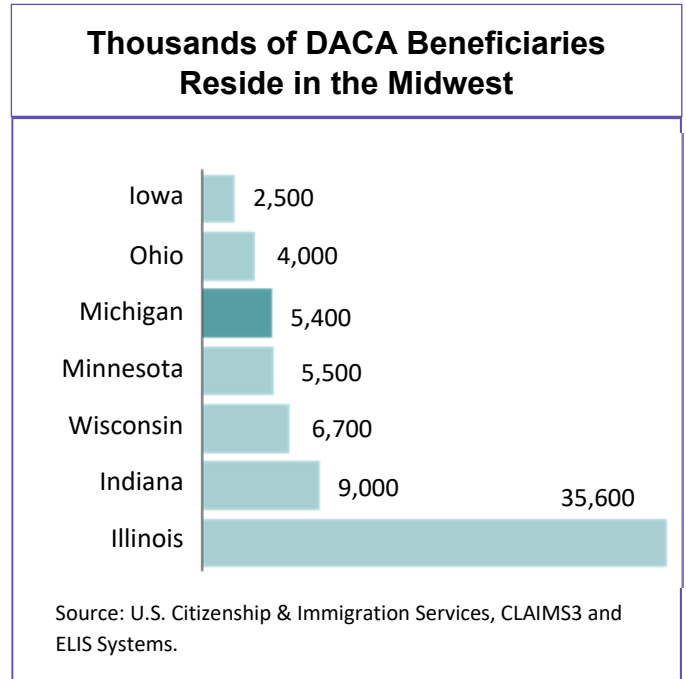
As of September 2017, there were 689,800 active DACA beneficiaries across the country. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that in 2017 there were approximately 1.3 million undocumented immigrants who met the eligibility requirements to apply for DACA, and approximately 68% ultimately submitted an application for the program as of June 30, 2017. In Michigan there are approximately 5,400 young adults enrolled in the program.<sup>2</sup> The total share of DACA-eligible immigrants in Michigan totaled 15,000 as of 2014.<sup>3</sup> High application fees, legal fees and a shortage of community resources to navigate the application process were common barriers for many Dreamers hoping to enroll in the program but who ultimately did not apply.

Among those individuals who are no longer enrolled in the program, approximately 70,000 individuals did not renew their benefits or were denied, and approximately 40,000 adjusted their status and obtained green cards, granting them permanent residence in the United States and a path to citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

## DACA RESCINDED

Shortly after the DACA program's fifth anniversary on Sept. 5, 2017, the U.S. Attorney General announced that the Justice Department would end the program over a six-month phasing out period. As of that date, United States Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) stopped accepting new DACA applications. As of Oct. 5, 2017, the federal government is no longer accepting renewal applications. Nearly 700,000 beneficiaries across the country will be affected by the termination of this

program. **In Michigan, thousands of undocumented immigrants currently enrolled in DACA stand to lose their ability to work and go to school without fear of deportation.**



### The Original Dreamers: Toward a Two-Generation Approach

The parents of Dreamers who participate in the DACA program are more often than not undocumented themselves. Many of them chose to leave their native countries with their young children because of economic hardship, while others chose to do so as a result of natural disasters or ongoing violent conflict in their countries. Unlike their children, parents of Dreamers were ineligible for enrollment in the DACA program and continue to live in the shadows of their communities due to fear of separation from their loved ones. Approximately 97,000 undocumented immigrants, some of whom are parents of Dreamers, called Michigan home as of 2014 (the latest year for which data is available). Almost a third—32% (28,000)—of these parents reside in mixed-legal status families with at least one U.S.-citizen child under the age of 18. While some arrived to Michigan recently, many have called Michigan home for years. A little more than half of all undocumented immigrants have lived in Michigan for 10 or more years, while approximately 11% (10,670) have lived in Michigan for 20 or more years.

Additionally, 8% (7,000) of undocumented immigrants in Michigan are parents of “**Little Dreamers**,” undocumented immigrant children who were too young to meet age or education requirements for the DACA program, but who could become eligible for a similar program in the coming years. These young Dreamers are the most vulnerable to developing mental health problems like depression and anxiety following the detention or deportation of a parent. Young children are also more likely to experience long-term economic hardship if a primary caregiver is deported.

The well-being of Little Dreamers and their older counterparts is tied to the well-being of their parents, and the opportunities they have access to in the United States. **For this reason, policymakers should engage in a two-generation approach when it comes to crafting policies that impact undocumented immigrants in Michigan. Ensuring that parents of Dreamers have access to good jobs, a living wage and affordable housing are just some of the many ways policymakers can boost the health and economic well-being of immigrant families.**

Sources: 2011-2015, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates; Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-2014 ACS pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) by James Bachmeier of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute; “U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement,” American Immigration Council.

DACA beneficiaries come from different regions and countries around the world. In the U.S., the top five countries of origin for beneficiaries are: Mexico (79.4%), El Salvador (3.7%), Guatemala (2.6%), Honduras (2.3 %) and Peru (1.1%). In Michigan, the top country of origin for DACA-eligible immigrants is Mexico.<sup>5</sup> The majority (53%) of DACA beneficiaries across the country are women, and two-thirds of them are 25 years of age or younger.

Compared to its Midwestern neighbors, Michigan is home to a smaller number of DACA beneficiaries. Illinois, with 35,600 beneficiaries, is a traditional immigrant destination and home to the largest number of beneficiaries in the region. Across the country, DACA program participants are largely concentrated in densely populated urban areas. Detroit, for example, is one of 20 metro areas across the country where three-quarters of all DACA beneficiaries reside.

## DACA'S IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES

### Impact on Employment

By providing beneficiaries with temporary work permits, DACA enabled individuals to access better paying jobs and pursue careers in their areas of interest.<sup>6</sup> A 2016 study of DACA beneficiaries found that DACA increased the likelihood of participants' employment through expanded labor force participation, while also decreasing the rate of unemployment for individuals.<sup>7</sup>

**As of September 2017, more than half (55%) of all DACA program participants across the country were employed** (48% were female and 64% were male), making up a total of 382,400 workers in the labor force. Meanwhile, a large majority (62%, 154,108) of those not in the labor force were enrolled in school.<sup>8</sup>

**Thousands of Dreamers are balancing work and school.** Researchers at the Migration Policy Institute found that about a quarter of DACA enrollees are juggling both college classes and work, suggesting that beneficiaries must work in order to afford their education. When it comes to occupational groups, DACA beneficiaries are most commonly employed in white-collar occupations. Compared to undocumented immigrants without DACA status, DACA beneficiaries are more likely to work in office settings, and less likely than their counterparts to work in blue-collar occupations like construction, suggesting that DACA opens the door to better employment opportunities for individuals.<sup>9</sup>

### Impact on Education

In a 2013 research study, researchers sampled over a thousand DACA beneficiaries and found that a majority of respondents perceived that their DACA status enabled them to pursue educational opportunities they previously did not have access to.<sup>10</sup> Researchers at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) confirm these findings, providing a fuller picture of their education and enrollment statuses.

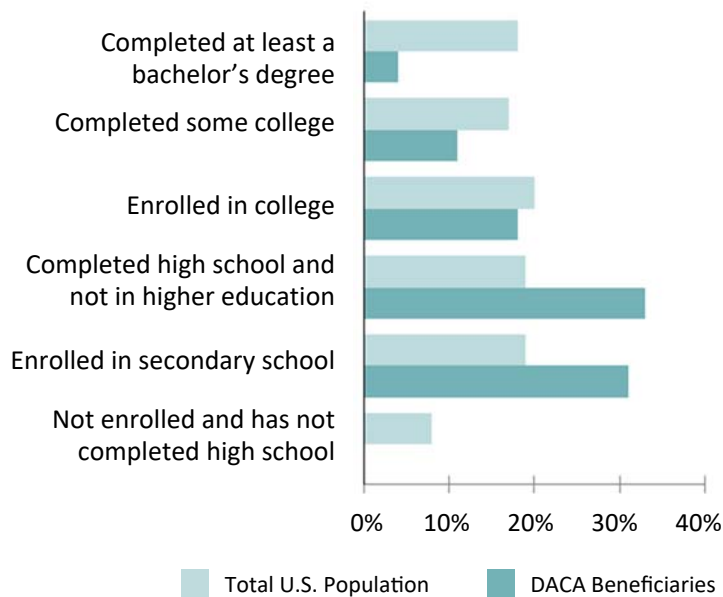
Researchers estimate that a total of 37% of DACA participants were enrolled in some type of postsecondary education program as of September 2017. Of these students, one-third were also working, while 8% were unemployed and 59% were not in the labor force.<sup>11</sup>

Employed Current DACA Beneficiaries in U.S., by Major Occupational Group		
Industry	Number	Share (%)
<b>Current DACA Beneficiaries Employed</b>	<b>382,400</b>	<b>100</b>
Food Preparation and Serving	59,500	16
Sales	53,500	14
Office and Administrative Support	47,000	12
Construction	38,700	10
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	32,300	8
Production	31,200	8
Transportation and Material Moving	26,400	7
Management	14,200	4
Personal Care and Service	14,000	4
Farming, Fishing and Forestry	12,300	3
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	10,800	3
Education, Training and Library	8,800	2
Healthcare Support	8,600	2
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	5,300	1
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media	3,500	<1
Business Operations Specialists	2,800	<1
Computer and Mathematical	2,600	<1
Protective Services	2,300	<1
Financial Specialists	2,200	<1
Architecture and Engineering	<2,000	<1
Community and Social Services	<2,000	<1
Life, Physical and Social Science	<1,500	<1
Legal	<1,000	<1
Extraction	<1,000	<1
Military Specific	<500	<1

Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010-14 ACS and 2008 SIPP, with legal status assignment by Bachmeier and Van Hook.

Though more than a third of individuals were estimated to be enrolled in school, the majority (62%) were not. Among beneficiaries who were not enrolled in school, 69% were employed, while 9% were unemployed and 22% were not participating in the labor force, as of September 2017.<sup>12</sup>

## Education and Enrollment Status of DACA Beneficiaries in U.S. (ages 15 to 32)



Note: Source excluded data on DACA-eligible individuals “not enrolled in and have not completed high school” because most had already completed high school; consistent with the program’s education requirement.

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2014 ACS and 2008 SIPP

**When it comes to college, researchers found that DACA beneficiaries are almost as likely as their U.S.-born adult counterparts to be enrolled in college (18% versus 20%), but are much less likely to graduate.** This latter finding can at least partially be attributed to the steep tuition costs undocumented immigrant students are required to pay each year. In states like Michigan, where there is no statewide tuition-equity policy, undocumented students’ state residency is not recognized, and students are forced to cover out-of-state tuition costs to stay in school. Additionally, these young adults are not eligible for federal financial aid and must instead lean on personal savings, private scholarships and high-interest private loans to cover tuition and college-related costs. Michigan is unique in that the only way to achieve a statewide tuition-equity policy is by amending the state constitution. Despite this, a number of public and private universities in Michigan have begun to implement tuition-equity policies to alleviate the burden of tuition on undocumented students.

As millennials, young immigrants enrolled in DACA are part of the most educated generation of Americans, but data

shows that even with DACA status, these young adults’ educational gains still lag behind those of U.S.-born Americans and other immigrants residing in the United States.<sup>13</sup> What is even more alarming is the impact that a loss of DACA status will have on thousands of beneficiaries who are currently enrolled in school. Without the prospect of being able to work legally in their profession, many students may drop out of school and lose out on their educational dreams and the promise of increased earnings that a college degree affords.

### THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DREAMERS

DACA has enabled a generation of young immigrants to not only pursue professional goals, but also help fill gaps in the labor market and grow the country’s skilled workforce. As workers and consumers, DACA participants and their families have helped revive local economies in the post-recession era. As taxpayers, these individuals and their families contribute to important public investments every year. Researchers at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP)

estimate that nationwide, DACA enrollees contribute \$2 billion in state and local taxes each year. **In Michigan, these young adults contribute \$13 million in state and local taxes annually.**<sup>14</sup> If federal elected officials fail to pass a replacement to DACA and beneficiaries’ work permits expire, their tax contributions will drop by more than half to \$5 million in revenue—an amount that is equivalent to 220 teacher salaries in Michigan.<sup>15</sup> This loss would prevent our state leaders from being financially able to make important investments in our schools, our hospitals and our communities. Alternatively, if Dreamers have a path to citizenship their naturalization will enable them to access better-paying jobs, leading to an increase in tax contributions. In Michigan, researchers estimate that as citizens, Dreamers would contribute \$6 million more in state and local taxes each year.<sup>16</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS OF ENDING DACA

The heightened policy backlash from state and federal elected officials against the undocumented immigrant

## 22,000 Missed Renewals

The end of the DACA program is already being felt by 22,000 beneficiaries who did not submit their last renewal applications for DACA status in time for the Oct. 5, 2017, deadline. In a controversial move, **the Department of Homeland Security chose not to notify individuals of the arbitrary October deadline**, giving only one month for individuals to submit their applications. **All 22,000 individuals who missed the deadline will lose their DACA status by March 5, 2018**, which is when the program is set to officially end. Researchers at the Center for American Progress estimate that, on average, beginning on Sept. 5, 2017, 122 individuals have lost their DACA status each day, and 122 will continue to do so every day until March 5, 2018, unless Congress takes action to pass a replacement to the program.

Source: Jawetz, T., and N. P. Svajlenka. (November 9, 2017). "Thousands of DACA Recipients Are Already Losing Their Protection from Deportation." Center for American Progress.

community in the last year has led to the permanent separation of families due to deportations and the threat of everyday harassment in public spaces. For DACA enrollees, the DACA program's termination has placed thousands at risk of losing the ability to live and work in the United States. **Researchers at MPI estimate that every day between March 6, 2018, and March 5, 2020, an average of 915 DACA enrollees will see their work permits expire and lose their protection from deportation across the country.**<sup>17</sup> DACA participants are currently employed across numerous industries make important contributions in our schools, hospitals and communities every day. The loss of their work permits could lead to job loss and place Dreamers and their families in economic jeopardy while endangering professional and educational dreams. This tenuous policy landscape gives reason to examine the consequences of eliminating DACA, and what it will mean for Michigan.

**The end of DACA could result in thousands of unnecessary deportations of Dreamers, which would not only be inhumane, but it would also translate into significant losses for Michigan.** If program participants are removed from our economy as workers and consumers, Michigan would experience a \$418 million annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) loss.<sup>18</sup> Over 10 years, our nation

would lose \$433.4 billion in GDP. A loss in productivity at the state and national level impacts Michigan's ability to sustain a post-recession recovery.

**The end of the DACA program hurts our labor market.** Research points to the central role that immigrants and children of immigrants will play in growing our labor force in the years to come. In fact, immigrants and their children are projected to be the primary drivers of growth in the working-age population through the year 2035. Specifically, the number of working age immigrants in the U.S. is projected to rise from 33.9 million in 2015 to 38.5 million by 2035. Given these projections, it is imperative that policymakers work toward integrating undocumented immigrants into our communities to ensure that our skilled and educated workforce remains solvent for years to come.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **A Pathway to Citizenship.** The DACA program provided only temporary relief from deportation for most participants (though there has already been one reported case of a DACA beneficiary being deported to their country of birth).<sup>19</sup> A pathway to citizenship would enable young immigrants and their families to contribute fully to their communities and the economy. Given the program's recent termination, it is crucial that federal policymakers act now to pass a permanent solution to the issue.
2. **Tuition-Equity Policies at all Michigan Colleges and Universities.** The high cost of higher education continues to be a barrier to college for many DACA participants. Pursuant to the state constitution, undocumented students are considered "out-of-state" for tuition purposes and are therefore required to pay out-of-state tuition at many Michigan higher-education institutions, despite the fact that many have lived in Michigan long enough to otherwise qualify as state residents. All Michigan universities and private colleges should adopt tuition-equity policies to recognize these students' residency for tuition purposes.
3. **Access to Occupational and Professional Licenses.** Another way policymakers can strengthen outcomes

among young undocumented immigrants is by making them eligible for occupational and professional licenses. In Michigan, no state law has been passed that specifies DACA beneficiaries as a category of non-citizens eligible for obtaining occupational and professional licenses. Their ineligibility means that some cannot put their education and training into action despite their investment in their education. The absence of this policy can also be a deterrent to enrollment in programs that require licensure, and it contributes to a shortage of skilled labor in our state.

4. **Policies for Social and Economic Inclusion.** Recent waves of anti-immigrant policies and legislation in our state and at the federal level threaten the well-

being of thousands of immigrant families in Michigan. Through a flood of anti-immigrant executive orders signed by President Trump earlier this year, the Department of Homeland Security ramped up immigration enforcement forces across the country, which has led to the senseless separation of many immigrant families in Michigan.<sup>20</sup> Research shows that inclusive policy is the best way forward for states with growing immigrant communities. Members of Congress and the Michigan Legislature can act immediately to abandon policies of exclusion and introduce policies that eliminate barriers to success for Michigan's immigrant families.

## ENDNOTES

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