

# *LWVUS Supports Dream Act*

Mary Ann Reeves

In 2012, President Obama signed an executive action granting protection from deportation to hundreds of thousands of young adults under a program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). These children are now known colloquially as “Dreamers.” As an executive action, it is not law. It can be rescinded, and that was done by the current administration on September 5, 2017. This has put the futures of 8,000 young Dreamers in Tennessee, and over 800,000 nationwide, in jeopardy. Chris Carson, LWVUS President, joined the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and over 180 other organizations in a letter to Congress urging passage of a clean Dream Act that will protect these children.

These young people came to the U.S. as babies or young children and have no memory of their birth countries. Many do not speak the language of their birthplace. They grew up in American schools and American communities. They play sports, are class leaders, academics, class clowns, and many are addicted to pizza, too. In other words, they are American kids.

DACA has been a lifeline allowing these young adults to work (they can now receive a social security card), to drive (they can now receive a modified driver’s license), and to more fully participate in their communities. These young people are the most vetted individuals in the United States. They must register with the federal government, meet strict age requirements, participate in extensive background checks, undergo significant biometrics, and pay fees. They will add over \$430 billion over the next 10 years to the gross domestic product.

The price has been high for the Dreamers, and certain obstacles do not change under DACA. Even though undocumented immigrants pay all taxes, including Social Security, they are not eligible for any public benefits.

Some states, including Tennessee, do not allow a DACA student to attend a state college unless they pay a prohibitive out-of-state tuition tax. Since these students are not eligible for student aid or student loans, attending college is very difficult. Private colleges usually cannot even be considered.

They cannot leave the U.S. for college educational trips, visits to grandparents, or for work. The deportation deferment is for only two years, after which the process, with its attendant fees, must be done again. And arguably the most difficult part of the vetting process is the exposure of their undocumented parents and siblings to immigration authorities.

The current administration has vacillated on DACA, causing great uncertainty and even chaos. Current announcements indicate that there will be no clean DACA bill

presented by the administration to Congress. The border wall and enhanced security will be part of the DACA legislation, using the Dreamers as pawns.

As a country of immigrants, we are made stronger by our diversity. Yet multiple times this administration has discriminated against immigrants and communities of color. It is time for Congress to act to provide a path to citizenship or provision for young undocumented immigrants already living in the U.S. to earn legal status. Moving this policy forward will strengthen our nation, our security, and our society.

The League believes that to become citizens Dreamers must learn about our system of government, understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and swear allegiance to the United States of America. These are basic steps to integration in American society, and are expected of all immigrants who wish to become citizens. It is in the interests of current citizens, immigrants, and future generations that we build one nation.

The League of Women Voters is opposed to the deportation of non-criminal, undocumented immigrants. The League has urged Congress to pass the bipartisan Dream Act without amendment to protect, not turn away, the 800,00 young people who were brought to the United States as children and who have lived here throughout their lives.

For more information see LWVUS (<http://lww.org>), the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) <http://www.tnimmigrant.org/>, and other reliable news sources.

*Editor's note: Mary Ann Reeves is Immediate Past President of LWVOR, and is a current board member. Since we do not currently have a president, board members will be responsible for the column traditionally prepared by the president. Thank you, Mary Ann*