

League Issues - Making Democracy Work

Immigration

In April 2008, the League of Women Voters of the United States announced its League position on immigration. The League supports immigration policies that promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; and are responsive to those fleeing persecution or humanitarian crisis. The League supports federal comprehensive immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship. The League agrees that the deportation of unauthorized immigrants who have no history of criminal activity is inappropriate.

What does the Executive Action on immigration mean?

The executive action taken by President Barack Obama on November 20, 2014, is consistent with the League's position as is the thirty-nine similar executive orders issued by every president over the last sixty years in orders that have affected as much as 40 percent of the undocumented immigrant population.

The League supports the President's action and believes this action is within the executive authority of the President.

Enforcement of federal laws has always been prioritized based on the amount of resources allocated by Congress. This executive order will focus those resources on deportation of those who have committed serious criminal offenses and those who are national security threats rather than separating families.

Some believe the President has overstepped his authority in granting temporary protection from deportation to unauthorized immigrants who meet certain criteria. However, it should be noted that no one questioned Presidential authority when President Obama presided over the deportation of more undocumented immigrants than any other President—about 2 million since 2010.

It should also be noted that executive orders are temporary and have not—and will not—fix our broken immigration system. Permanent federal comprehensive immigration reform is, and will remain, the responsibility of the U.S. Congress.

How will the Executive Action be accomplished?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security will manage the process of implementing the executive action by providing temporary administrative relief from deportation to certain undocumented immigrants, mainly through the following actions:

Deferred Action for Parental Accountability. This is a new program which will allow undocumented immigrants who are the parents of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident children to receive temporary work authorization and protection from deportation if mandated residency and status requirements are met.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This existing program for youth who came to the U.S. as children will be expanded to include immigrants who entered the U.S. before their 16th birthday and meet certain residency, status, and educational requirements. The applicants cannot have been convicted of certain criminal offenses or disqualifying criminal conduct and must pass a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services background check.

Secure Communities. This onerous and widely discredited administrative program has been discontinued, to be replaced by a system that is supposed to better focus on genuine security threats. Secure Communities authorized local law enforcement to act on behalf of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and become, de facto, federal immigration police. The program had become mired in heavy criticism, lack of trust of local law enforcement, racial profiling, and litigation. Increasingly, governors, mayors, and state and local law enforcement officials have refused to cooperate with the program. A number of federal courts have ruled that the program violated the Fourth Amendment.

Work permits. These will be issued to qualifying immigrants. Even though undocumented immigrants already pay local, state, and many federal taxes, many people feel that these work permits will yield additional national economic benefits. Some estimate there will be an increase in national payroll taxes of almost \$23 billion over the next five years as well as net revenue increases at the state level. However, payment of these taxes will not allow immigrants access to public benefits or subsidies that other taxpayers enjoy.

Fines. All applying for the program will be fined to cover administrative costs. These fines are not trivial and will amount to hundreds of dollars per person.

The League feels that we will all benefit when more community members are able to live in Tennessee without fear, have permission to work, receive higher education, and participate more fully and completely in our communities.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League neither supports nor opposes any candidate, party, or political appointee.

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