

Out of the shadows, R.I.'s 'Dreamers' now again face a twilight of uncertainty

By Linda Borg Journal Staff Writer



Gov. Gina Raimondo, Democratic party Chairman Joe McNamara, Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza and other officials listen to “Dreamer” Javier Juarez, a Rhode Island College graduate now pursuing a master’s degree at Brown outside the Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls on Tuesday. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / STEVE SZYDLOWSKI]

CENTRAL FALLS — For Alexander Gonzalez Trejo and thousands of young adults like him, a dream deferred might be a dream denied.

Born in Guatemala, Trejo aced his classes at Classical High School, then did the same at Community College of Rhode Island. Now he is on his way toward earning a biology degree. He hopes to become a surgeon.

Trejo came out of the shadows after President Barack Obama signed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, in 2012, which allowed undocumented immigrants who came here as children to go to work or school in the United States.

Now, President Donald Trump’s decision to roll back the program threatens the rights of nearly 800,000 “Dreamers,” 1,229 of them in Rhode Island.

“It takes a lot to scare me. But the stress, the fear that I felt before, it came right back. I know the views of his administration don’t reflect that of every single U.S. citizen. But it’s heartbreaking to think there are people who feel this way.”

— Alexander Gonzalez Trejo, 27, brought to the United States as a child from his native Guatemala

Trejo, 27, is here legally until November 2018. Afterward, his future is in limbo.

“I’m a very strong individual,” he said. “It takes a lot to scare me. But the stress, the fear that I felt before, it came right back. I know the views of his administration don’t reflect that of every single U.S. citizen. But it’s heartbreaking to think there are people who feel this way.

“These individuals are your friends, your neighbors, your loved ones,” he said. “These are just people who want to make something better of their lives.”

At a press conference in Central Falls on Tuesday, Gov. Gina Raimondo, along with nearly every member of her administration, denounced Trump’s efforts to potentially send thousands of young Dreamers back to their countries of origin.

“Rhode Island will stand by our Dreamers,” she said in front of Segue Institute for Learning, a charter school. “All they want is the same chance we had. Let’s send a message to President Trump. Their politics of hate aren’t going to be tolerated.”

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin vowed to join other state attorneys general in a legal challenge against the Trump administration's decision.

"President Trump has committed a moral crime against children," he said. "That plain isn't right."

Central Falls Mayor James Diossa said Trump's decision has "ripped the heart out of the American dream," adding that the Dreamers are "our lawyers, our doctors, our creators, our builders. This is about the American dream. If we can't stand for this, what do we stand for?"

Central Falls Supt. Victor Capellan said his message to parents is the same: "Schools are a safe place. They are a resource for them, and if they have any questions, we're going to be here for them."

Sarah Friedman, co-director of the Learning Community charter school in Central Falls, worries about her parents, some of whom are working here legally under DACA.

"Ending DACA is a moral failure of the Trump administration," she said. "These children and their families fled violent circumstance in their home countries. As a nation, we should be driven by compassion, not greed."

Another young adult, Javier Juarez, said his dream of America began when he stepped off a Greyhound bus as a 10-year-old.

He saved for college and then dropped out because he didn't have enough money. Then, Obama enacted DACA by executive order, and Juarez felt like he had a future.

"I got a driver's license, a work permit, a job with a competitive salary and benefits," Juarez said. "I returned to college."

This spring, he graduated cum laude from Rhode Island College. In June, he was accepted into a master's program at Brown University.

"DACA gave me the courage to dream," he said. "Now the dream I have depended on is gone."

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