

Fresno's Mexican Consulate to expand services following Obama immigration action

By Andrea Castillo

The [Consulate of Mexico](#) plans to expand its services in the central San Joaquin Valley in response to President Barack Obama's executive action on immigration last week.

That includes expanding the consulate's call center, increasing hours of operation and outreach to areas outside of Fresno, and collaborating with immigration attorneys and local nonprofits to explain the new programs and help people apply.

"We want to serve our Mexican community the best we can," Consul Vicente Sanchez Ventura said during a news conference Monday in northwest Fresno. "We will be able to respond."

[Obama's action](#) allows around 5 million unauthorized immigrants to remain in the U.S. The biggest chunk will come under a program for undocumented parents of legal residents and citizen children, who will be eligible for deportation relief and renewable three-year work permits. They must pass background checks, pay taxes and prove that their child was born before the date of the executive action.

The plan also expands the number of young undocumented immigrants who qualify for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program created under executive action in 2012 that shields them from deportation and grants them renewable two-year work permits. Previously, immigrants were only eligible if they were born after 1981 and entered the country before 2007. That date has shifted to Jan. 1, 2010, and no longer includes an age limit.

Nearly 3.2 million immigrants in California lack legal status, according to the Migration Policy Institute. They make up more than 8% of the state's population and 83% have lived in the country for more than five years. The institute estimates that almost 1.6 million people in California could be shielded from deportation under Obama's action.

Sanchez Ventura acknowledged it will be tough to meet the anticipated need, considering the consulate already will be busy helping Mexican nationals apply for [new driver's licenses](#). Starting Jan. 2, residents who can't prove they are in the United States legally will be able to drive under a new state law, which Gov. Jerry Brown signed last year. But Sanchez Ventura hopes people will think ahead and get help now instead of waiting until the last minute.

Applications for the new programs are not expected to be released for a couple of months, but attorneys at the news conference urged immigrants to start preparing their records now. Those applying for deportation reprieve under Deferred Action and the new program for undocumented parents must prove they have been continuously present in the country since Jan. 1, 2010.

Attorney Lazaro Salazar said official records can include anything with a letterhead: Financial documents, bank records, health care records and American children's birth certificates. He said one client even used a letter from a priest attesting that the person was a member of his congregation.

Salazar also warned about unlicensed "notarios" — people posing as tax preparers or lawyers who target immigrants. In Latin American countries, "notario publicos" are qualified lawyers who can charge thousands of dollars for a wide range of consumer and legal services. In the United States, however, people posing as notarios lack licenses and training.

Attorney Jessica Smith Bobadilla said she saw young immigrants fall prey to unlicensed attorneys when Deferred

Action started in 2012 and expects the same to happen this time.

“We just want people to be really mindful,” she said. “There are situations where people unfortunately are eligible and end up in deportation proceedings unnecessarily when these things happen.”

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