

Fresno city leader, rights groups denounce judge's ruling on Obama's immigration action

By Andrea Castillo

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Fresno City Council Member Esmeralda Soria speaks during a news conference Tuesday about a federal ruling that temporarily halts executive actions on immigration.

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- [Court ruling puts Obama's immigration work on hold](#)

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Who: UFW Foundation and Mi Familia Vota

What: Hosting info session for those interested in learning more about Obama's executive actions on immigration

When: 10 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Feb. 21

Where: Manchester Mall, 1901 E. Shields Ave., on the main floor close to the merry-go-round

Contact: (559) 496-0700

Fresno City Council member Esmeralda Soria joined immigrant rights groups at a news conference Tuesday denouncing the federal court ruling that temporarily blocks President Barack Obama's [executive actions on immigration](#).

A federal judge in Texas [issued the decision Monday night](#), allowing a coalition of mostly Republican governors and attorneys general in 26 states to go forward with a lawsuit intending to stop the actions for good. On Tuesday, the White House announced plans to appeal.

Soria said she is the proud daughter of Mexican farmworker parents who became citizens under the 1986 reform that granted legal status to millions of undocumented immigrants. She said she is confident a higher court will overrule U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen's decision.

"We are a country of immigrants," she said. "We cannot forget this."

The administration planned to start accepting applications for deportation relief and renewable work permits from undocumented immigrants older than 30 who came to the United States as children. Obama created Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals under executive action in 2012, limiting those eligible to 30 or younger. He expanded the program under his actions last November.

At that time, Obama also established a new program: Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents. DAPA would shield undocumented parents of U.S. citizens and legal residents from deportation and granting them work permits.

Together, the two programs could shield nearly 4 million immigrants nationwide from deportation.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said Tuesday that because of the decision, the department will not release applications for the expansion of DACA as it planned to do Wednesday. The department will also suspend its plan to release applications for DAPA in May, he said.

An estimated 18,000 young unauthorized immigrants in Fresno, Tulare and Madera counties could qualify for DACA, according to [Migration Policy Institute data](#). Another 50,000 undocumented parents could qualify in the tri-county area for DAPA.

Nearly 3.2 million immigrants in California lack legal status. The institute estimates that almost 1.6 million people in California could be shielded from deportation under Obama's action.

Tuesday in Fresno, immigrants and supporters gathered in front of the Robert E. Coyle Federal Building downtown. Among them were leaders from Mi Familia Vota, a nonprofit civic engagement organization, El Concilio de Fresno, a nonprofit Latino advocacy group, and UFW Foundation for farmworkers and immigrants.

Leonel Flores, an immigrant activist with the May 1st Coalition, stressed the continued need for comprehensive immigration reform. Even if it takes weeks or months to implement the executive actions, he said, immigrants should

continue to prepare to apply.

“The decision of the federal judge of Texas does not intimidate us,” he said in Spanish.

Some Fresnoans are pleased with the ruling. Local tea party activist Serafin Quintanar said Obama’s executive actions are unconstitutional and Congress should outlaw the maneuver.

“I think it’s a positive ruling,” he said of Hanen’s decision. “If the policy came through Congress and became law, whether or not I agree with it, that’s the proper channel.”

Sanger Democrat Amanda Renteria, who unsuccessfully ran for Congress last year against Hanford Republican David Valadao, told immigrant supporters it’s important to push forward despite the federal decision, though it will be a long fight.

“We want everyone to know this is only the first ruling,” she said, “and we’re going to win this thing.”

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