

Immigration advocates in Fresno call for support on deferred action

By Ricardo Cano
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Immigration reform advocates in Fresno are denouncing a federal lawsuit that blocked the enactment of programs aimed at providing work permits for undocumented immigrants.

Wielding signs that read, “Si se puede con DAPA” (Yes we can with DAPA), more than 20 advocates gathered outside the Robert E. Coyle Federal Building in downtown Fresno on Tuesday in support of two federal programs in limbo.

President Barack Obama announced in November plans to introduce the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents program and to expand the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals program, which provides work permits to the undocumented.

Those programs — which do not provide legalization or a path to citizenship — were slated to take effect Monday, but were shelved in wake of a federal suit by 26 state governors calling to block the programs.

Those at the gathering spoke of the need for deferred action. Fresno City Council Member Oliver Baines, who was in attendance, called those affected by the programs “undocumented citizens.”

“We have once again in our country managed to create a second-class society through an undocumented status,” Baines said. “And as hard as we’ve been pushing for the last several years to have comprehensive immigration reform, we know we’re on the cusp of that. We know that it’s coming.”

The Fresno Immigration Coalition’s event was one of more than 35 rallies and conferences taking place across the country as part of the a “Nationwide Day of Immigration Action.” In state capitals like Austin, Texas — the state that spearheaded the suit — and Raleigh, North Carolina, advocates marched to the governors’ mansions.

Giselle Gasca, a third-year Fresno State business student who migrated from Mexico City at age 10, said receiving aid from DACA helped her get a job to help pay for school and family bills. But uncertainty looms for her and others.

“We have nothing for sure and we have nothing secure with DACA and DAPA,” said Gasca, who hopes to open her own business in Fresno. “We are not here to hurt anybody. We are here to be supportive members of society.”

Olga Grosh, attorney for Pasifika Immigration Law Group in Fresno, said the current DACA program is “alive and well” and unaffected by the suit. Those who qualify would receive two-year deferred action permits under the original DACA if they apply, she said.

But regardless of whichever side wins or loses the suit, she said, all signs point toward an appeal in U.S. Supreme Court, further lengthening any course of action.

“Today was supposed to be a historic day,” said Pedro Elias, a Fresno Immigration Coalition organizer. “But because of this lawsuit we’re having to wait and see the fate of families and students who are working hard to provide not only for this country but also their communities.”

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