Clinic at IPFW will assist area Dreamers

Lawyers to help concerned immigrants pursue options

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Local advocates for Dreamers – children of undocumented immigrants – will try to help them stay in the country while President Donald Trump and Congress decide their ultimate fate.

Desiree Koger-Gustafson, director of Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic, said Monday the organization will have a clinic at IPFW this weekend to assist people wanting to renew their participation in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which grants protection against deportation for two years at a stretch.

Koger-Gustafson said attorneys will be at Walb Student Union Room 114 from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday to help DACA participants fill out paperwork, which must be submitted by Oct. 5 to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for people whose benefits expire before March 5.

“If you have someone who is DACA, now is the time to maybe re-examine possibilities for immigration and to sit down with somebody who really knows the ropes ... to take a look at your big picture and see if you have other avenues,” Koger-Gustafson told about 40 people attending a DACA community forum at IPFW.

Clare Corado, an immigration attorney from Indianapolis, said there are “hundreds of different programs and visa options. ... If you have another option, it's time to start it now and maybe do it simultaneously with the DACA.”

The Trump administration announced this month its intent to repeal DACA, established by executive order by President Barack Obama in 2012, by early March. About 800,000 DACA participants live in the U.S., including about 10,000 in Indiana, according to federal data.
One is Carlos Lopez, 20, a sophomore at IPFW studying mechanical engineering. Lopez said Monday at the IPFW forum that his family brought him to the United States from Mexico when he was 7 and that DACA “has been blessing me” and “changed my life.”

Lopez, who said he works more than 30 hours a week at a Fort Wayne department store, referred to America as “my country – because that's what I consider it as, since I grew up here most of my years.”

Luz Ostrognai, immigration supervisor for Catholic Charities of the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese, said she has hundreds of clients participating in DACA, most of them originally from Mexico.

“They have jobs, they are paying taxes, they are in a school. ... They are making such a contribution to our economy and to our country,” Ostrognai said.

Repealing DACA would be “just catastrophic. They are losing everything,” she said.

In separate lawsuits, a group of six DACA participants and the NAACP sued the Trump administration Monday, claiming the program's pending termination would violate their constitutional rights of due process and equal protection. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia earlier sued the White House, contending that DACA's repeal would be unconstitutional and unlawful.

Corado said the debate “needs to come out of the courts and into Congress." Asked what DACA supporters should do, she instructed, “Call your senator and representative.”

DACA participants are called Dreamers because Obama created the program after Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act, which would have provided a path to U.S. residency for the children of undocumented immigrants.

Trump on Sept. 5 challenged Congress to “legalize DACA," writing on Twitter, “If they can't, I will revisit this issue!”

IPFW's Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs sponsored Monday’s forum and is a partner in Saturday's DACA renewal clinic. People wanting to renew their DACA status at the clinic should have two passport-size photos of themselves and a money order or check for $495 to pay the renewal fee.

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