



Waiting for the DACA Decision During the Pandemics: Two Perspectives

By Dilma Da Silva and Julio Maldonado Guzman

The U.S. Supreme Court will soon deliver the long-awaited decision on the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA) program. This program offers work authorization and protection from deportation to hundreds of thousands of immigrants who came to the United States as children – the “Dreamers.” This waiting period, coinciding with the drastic change in society that we are experiencing as a result of the pandemics, colors the world very differently depending on where one stands.

A sea of uncertainty – Julio Maldonado

My DACA status expires on May 1, 2021. That could be the last day I’m allowed to legally live and work in this country. I would be at risk of deportation by simply existing, I would lose my job as a software engineer, and my driver’s license would no longer be valid.

It is typically recommended to renew your DACA status five months before it expires. The application fee is \$495. Once it is approved, you get two more years. I’m preparing

my DACA renewal application for the 5th time now. This time, I'm doing it myself to save the typical \$300 paralegal fee because money is tight right now. I'm fortunate to still have a job, but I'm well aware of how much longer the stay-at-home order can go on in Seattle, affecting all businesses.

As soon as COVID-19 deaths were reported at the Life Care Center of Kirkland, a mere 20-minute drive from my apartment in Seattle, I booked a flight back home to the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. I distinctly recall being one of the few people at the airport or on my flights from Seattle to Houston and from Houston to Harlingen that wore a mask. I packed five changes of clothes just in case things would get better fast, but of course, we all know they didn't.

I have a busy life back in Seattle. Along with being a full-stack software engineer (i.e., responsible for databases, servers, systems engineering, and business logic), I co-lead an organization that recruits and empowers talent of color at Qualtrics. When I have free time – and it's not raining or freezing – I explore the city, in amazement as I never thought somebody like me would get to experience a big city. In such moments, I am very proud of the life I have built for myself – I achieved my American Dream.

I've been in the Rio Grande Valley for over two months now, working remotely through this pandemic as the Supreme Court takes on DACA. The good news is I still have the

same job and co-lead the same organization. The bad news is that DACA could be terminated any day now.

The most frustrating aspect is the uncertainty – a decision could have come as early as March 9, 2020, or as late as June 29, 2020. The decision could actually be delayed until a later Supreme Court session. Surprisingly, that is one of the best possible outcomes for us during this time.

It is almost comedic that I'm praying the decision is postponed, so the incalculable stress and anxiety that has built up inside of me could be temporarily relieved. I fear a decision upholding the current administration's repeal of DACA would void all my efforts to get to where I am today. It's a depressing feeling I know 700,000 other Dreamers are feeling right now.

The hope for a silver lining in the crisis – Dilma Da Silva

I was born in Brazil, and I came to the United States legally to pursue a Ph.D. in Computer Science. My path to citizenship was smooth, paved by the scientific accomplishments that put me in the "outstanding researcher" track as the booming tech industry absorbed all the talent it could find. It is not my background that connects me to the Dreamers; it is the belief that our country needs them.

We cannot afford to waste expertise in science, computing, and engineering. In particular, the tech industry is in desperate need of Hispanics/LatinX talent (94% of the DACA recipients are from Mexico, Central, or South America.) More than 300 tech leaders – including Apple CEO Tim Cook, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, and Microsoft CEO Satya Nadela – signed a group letter sent to President Trump. They pointed out that Dreamers are vital to the future of our companies and the economy. I had the privilege of contributing to the education of my co-author Julio Maldonado. Julio is not only super smart, but he leveraged every opportunity he found during his undergraduate days to grow in knowledge, technical depth, and leadership skills. Any leading tech company in the world is lucky to have an engineer like Julio.

Back in March, as I tried to make sense of the pandemic and its implications, I learned that the U. S. Supreme Court received a [new filing](#) urging the justices to take into account the new reality of a global pandemic: 29,000 Dreamers healthcare workers are on the front line and terminating DACA would be catastrophic to the country. The dependence of the healthcare system on Dreamers had already been communicated to the court in October 2019, in a [filing by the Association of American Medical Colleges](#). It was a turning point for me: I became more in peace with the new reality, infused with new hope for the Dreamers, the 29,000 DACA recipients who are frontline health care workers, 12,700 who work in the health care industry, the 14,900 teachers, and the 142,100 in food-related occupations. Also, the Dreamers who advance science and

give us hope for a vaccine and the computer scientists, like Julio, who enable the tech products that have been connecting all of us.

