



March 19, 2026

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of TheDream.US and the thousands of Scholars, Alumni, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients we serve, I write to urge your immediate attention to troubling developments that are undermining the stability and protections the DACA program was intended to provide. We write to you about three concerning issues currently being experienced by our DACA holders: growing delays in the processing of DACA renewal applications, reports that some renewals are being indefinitely paused under country-specific holds, and the detention and deportation of DACA recipients. Together, these developments are placing DACA holders at serious risk—often through no fault of their own. We outline these concerns in greater detail below.

[TheDream.US](https://www.thedream.us) is the nation's leading organization supporting Dreamers at the intersection of higher education, workforce development, immigration, and advocacy. We've awarded over 12,000 scholarships to immigrant youth from 120+ countries and 45 states, with 4,500 graduates to date. We partner with close to 80 colleges in 20 states and Washington D.C. to provide scholarships, career support, and access to legal options that help Dreamers break through systemic barriers and achieve social mobility. Notably, about half of our community of Dreamers participates in the DACA program.

DACA Processing Delays

Our DACA-holding Scholars and Alumni are starting to face serious and growing delays in the adjudication of their renewal applications — even when filed on time and in full compliance with agency guidelines. When delays persist, applicants risk expiration of their status, immediate job loss, and an ever-present threat of detention and removal. These delays cannot be attributed to any government funding lapse: USCIS is a fee-for-service agency whose adjudications are funded entirely by the fees applicants themselves pay — not congressional appropriations. Over the fourteen years since DACA was established, individual recipients have each paid an estimated \$3,435 in filing fees to USCIS alone. Many have paid \$6,000 to \$15,000 or more in legal services. DACA holders have demonstrated their commitment to the program, and they deserve timely decisions on their renewal requests.

DACA recipients are no strangers to this country. 110,000 to 150,000 of them are married to U.S. citizens and they have an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 U.S.-born children. More than 94% of DACA holders are employed and, in their first decade in the program, earned an estimated \$108 billion in wages, paid \$20 billion in federal taxes, and \$13 billion in state and local taxes—making them indispensable to our economy and communities. Processing delays are not a bureaucratic inconvenience — they are a serious and unacceptable harm to people who have played by every rule and invested deeply in this nation.

Just one of many case examples is that of Virginia, someone who has been vetted, approved, and contributing to this country for years under DACA — and is now married to a U.S. citizen. She filed her renewal four months before her status expired, requested expedited processing, was told she qualified, and then was never contacted as promised. She has since filed multiple service requests, engaged U.S. Representative Maria Elvira Salazar's office, and received nothing but contradictions: first that her case could be expedited, then that it couldn't — with no real explanation. Ten months after filing, she has no work authorization and no commitment or timeline to adjudicate her application. This is not a case of someone unknown to our government. She has been vetted repeatedly. The system failed her — not the other way around.

Country-Specific Pauses on DACA Renewals

Compounding the processing delays are the country-specific DACA renewal adjudications freezes. DACA holders in our community have been told—or fear—that USCIS has paused adjudication of their renewal applications because of where they were born, citing the administration's executive orders related to visa restrictions and use of public benefits. The consequences are severe and immediate: recipients whose renewals are in limbo cannot legally work, lose their work authorization upon expiration, and fall out of status — which then makes them targets for enforcement described.

The public benefits justification would be particularly difficult to reconcile with reality. DACA recipients, like all non-citizens without lawful permanent residence, are categorically ineligible for federal public benefits. They are self-supporting by law. A policy that forces them out of employment in the name of preventing public dependency achieves precisely the opposite of its stated goal — and would cause serious, unnecessary harm to individuals, families, and the communities and employers who rely on them.

For further context, here are two case examples of the harms caused by the country-specific pause on adjudications:

An orthopedic surgeon in New York entered the United States lawfully at age seven three decades ago, has DACA, and has built his entire education and career here, completing medical school, an orthopedic surgery residency, and a PhD focused on nerve and muscle recovery. He has authored over 120 peer-reviewed publications and has received multiple academic honors for research and leadership. When his employment authorization expired on February 22, 2026, he was forced to step away from his clinical duties mid-practice, directly disrupting continuity of care for patients who had been scheduled for orthopedic evaluations and surgeries — procedures for debilitating conditions that cannot simply be handed off or rescheduled without consequence to those patients' mobility and quality of life. With the help of a Senate office, he learned that the adjudication of his DACA renewal is paused because he was born in Nigeria.

A Florida nurse supervisor with ten years of dedicated service at her local hospital now faces an abrupt interruption to her career due to a country-specific adjudication freeze confirmed by USCIS — one that applies to her solely because she was born in Haiti. She arrived in the United States in 1999 at the age of five, was raised and educated entirely in American public schools, earned her college degree here, and has lived in this country for nearly 27 years. She has met every requirement the government has asked of her — renewing on time, paying taxes, and building a life defined by work, responsibility, and community. As the primary breadwinner for her husband and three children, the stakes of this pause extend beyond her career: her patients' wellbeing and family's stability depends on her ability to work.

Detentions and Removals of DACA Recipients

Despite the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals' January 2025 ruling affirming the lawfulness of DACA's deportation protections, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has arrested and removed DACA recipients at a troubling scale. When both chambers of Congress separately asked the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for data in September 2025, they received alarming and inconsistent answers: DHS reported to the Senate that 261 DACA recipients had been arrested and 86 removed between January 1 and November 19, 2025 — and reported to the House that 270 had been arrested and 174 removed through September 28, 2025. Whatever the precise figures, the trend—which TheDream.US and our community has experienced firsthand—is unambiguous and deeply troubling.

DACA recipients are among the most thoroughly vetted immigrant populations in the country. Every two years they voluntarily come forward, submit biometrics, undergo background checks, and pay substantial government fees to renew their status—a process many have repeated for more than a decade. They comply with every requirement the

government sets, while studying, working, paying taxes, and contributing to their families and communities.

DHS told the House and Senate that these detentions are based on criminal history. This claim is difficult to reconcile with the security screenings of the DACA program. Individuals with a felony, a significant misdemeanor, multiple misdemeanors, or any threat to public safety or national security are categorically ineligible for DACA. Those who obtain and maintain DACA have repeatedly cleared one of the most rigorous background-check regimes applied to any immigrant group. DHS cannot impose strict eligibility standards for the program and then disregard those same standards in its enforcement actions. Doing so undermines the integrity of the program and harms the very people the government pledged to protect.

For context, here is one example of the needless harms of the indiscriminate immigration enforcement against deeply rooted DACA recipients who continue to clear the security and criminal requirements of the program:

Jahasiel Peña Enriquez is a DACA recipient who was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement during a traffic stop in Weslaco, Texas on January 29, 2026, even though his DACA protections were active and he had timely filed a DACA renewal application. Following his arrest, his pending DACA renewal application was not expedited despite a request from his U.S. Representative Vicente Gonzalez, with officials arguing he lacks legal status. At his first immigration court appearance on February 12—one day before his DACA status was set to expire—an immigration judge denied his request for release on bond, leaving him in federal detention. This has had significant consequences for his family: his wife, Brenda, reports that Jahasiel is the household's sole provider, and without his income she has struggled to support their children while working part-time and managing childcare. As of the date of this letter, Peña Enriquez remains in federal custody.

A Call for Congressional Action

The federal government made a commitment to these young people. In exchange, they have studied, worked, paid taxes, and built lives here — often knowing no other home. What is happening now — granting DACA with one hand while dismantling it through administrative delays, processing freezes, and immigration detentions and removals with the other — is a fundamental breach of that commitment.

We urge you to take the following steps:

- Urge the President to direct the Department of Homeland Security to faithfully administer the DACA program by promptly adjudicating renewal applications and honoring the program’s protections from deportation.
- Exercise your oversight authority to demand accurate, consistent, and complete data from DHS on the detention and removal of DACA recipients and call on DHS to halt the targeted and indiscriminate immigration enforcement against DACA recipients who continue to qualify under the program.
- Call for an immediate end to the country-specific pauses on DACA renewal adjudications, which are causing recipients to lose their status and work authorization through administrative inaction rather than any legal finding.
- Pass the Dream Act or equivalent legislation. Congress has neglected this issue for more than two decades. Statutory protection and a path to citizenship for Dreamers is the only durable solution — and it commands broad, bipartisan public support.

Dreamers and DACA recipients have long had the support of the American public—and the President of the United States. The actions we are now seeing from DHS run counter to that support and undermine trust in our laws and the systems meant to uphold them. The young people affected by these policies are Americans in every meaningful sense. They deserve a Congress that will stand up for them — with clear, unequivocal opposition to enforcement actions that violate the spirit of the government’s own commitments, and with legislation that finally puts this issue to rest.

TheDream.US stands ready to support your efforts and to connect you with the Scholars and Alumni whose stories make this more than a policy debate. To reach me with questions or for more information about the issues raised in this letter, please contact susan.collins@thedream.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maria Gabriela Pacheco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "P".

Maria Gabriela “Gaby” Pacheco
President and CEO | TheDream.US