

Undocumented immigrants seek deportation protection at Richmond summit

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Body

RICHMOND -- It was June when President Barack Obama announced the deferred action program, whereby qualified **undocumented immigrants** may receive two years of **protection** from **deportation**. By October, applications were pouring in at the rate of 5,328 per day.

The flow slowed as Election Day neared and fears among **immigrants** mounted that a Republican administration might repeal the program. Now, with Obama having been re-elected and Democrats having made gains in Congress:

"I think you've already seen a number of Republican senators saying they have to give serious consideration to immigration reform," said Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez), who hosted a deferred action **summit** Saturday at DeJean Middle School. "The Dream Act is probably the one they're most comfortable with. I think if you put it to a vote today, it would pass."

Deferred action is still new enough to be considered a revelation to some **undocumented immigrants**.

"Who would have thought five years ago that we would be able to apply for a work permit, or drive a car without being afraid of being pulled over by a cop?" Carlos Martinez, master of ceremonies for Saturday's event, asked a crowd of about 150.

The **summit** provided resources, including translation services, for those interested in applying. Catholic Charities, RYSE Youth Center, International Rescue Committee and the U.S. Department of Labor had information tables in the school's multiuse room.

Martinez, a **Richmond** resident who cofounded CLOUD (Community Leaders Organizing **Undocumented** Dreamers), said he was in Los Angeles preparing to engage in civil disobedience outside a detention center when he learned of Obama's announcement.

"Everyone was crying," he said. "It has changed my life drastically, from being in the shadows to jobs that are now well-paid. It has impacted the lives of thousands of young **undocumented** students."

According to the Immigration Policy Center, 1.8 million **undocumented** youths could meet the requirements for deferred action. According to the latest data released by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 308,935 applications were received through Nov. 20. Of those, 53,273 were approved, 10,101 were rejected and the rest were pending.

To Miller, who held a similar **summit** at Pleasant Hill's Diablo Valley College in August, immigration overhaul would produce wide-ranging community benefits.

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"It would rekindle the aspirations of why the immigrant community came here," he said. "It came here for a better life, and the foundation of that is education. So now you see your child or yourself can get a college education. You now have no limits. This is a very big part of our future economy to cultivate this kind of talent."

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