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Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon responds to President Obama's announcement of administrative relief for immigrant families

On Nov. 20, 2014, the Obama Administration announced that it will take the initial steps necessary to address serious problems with our immigration system. Through revising immigration enforcement priorities, expanding the Deferred Action Program, and streamlining the legal immigration system, the president has laid the framework for Congress to enact long-term legislative reform. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) welcomes this announcement.

“This program will allow many immigrant families to emerge from the shadows and will permit them to work legally, without the fear that they will be deported and separated from their loved ones,” says Caroline van der Harten, director of Immigrant and Refugee Ministries. “Although this program has the potential of helping millions, it still leaves out millions of other individuals who pay their taxes, attend our churches and contribute to our communities. Now is the time for Congress to complete the larger task of enacting Comprehensive Immigration Reform.”

In expanding the Deferred Action Program, the president will provide administrative relief to as many as five million individuals, bringing them out of the shadows and preventing them from being separated from their families. One major component of this expansion is the creation of the Deferred Action for Parents (DAP) program. To qualify for DAP, the individual must have: 1) a child with either U.S. Citizenship or Lawful Permanent Resident status, 2) continuously resided in the United States since Jan. 1, 2010; 3) been physically present in the United States since Nov. 20, 2014, and 4) a clean criminal record. Eligible individuals will receive employment authorization and protection from deportation for three years.

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ■ Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren ■ Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

Applications for the program will be accepted in approximately 180 days, but qualifying individuals can prepare by gathering the necessary documents.

Another aspect of the Deferred Action Program expansion relates to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The new guidelines expand the eligibility criteria for a grant of DACA to undocumented youth by eliminating the age limit and modifying the required entry date from June 15, 2007, to Jan. 1, 2010. As was required before, these individuals must still have a clean criminal record and must meet the education requirement.

Although these changes provide some relief, it is a temporary grant that must be renewed, and it does not provide a pathway to citizenship. President Obama's announcement is only the first step in beginning to fix the broken immigration system. The Senate passed a bipartisan Comprehensive Immigration reform bill more than 500 days ago, and we are hopeful that the Congress will act with this momentum to enact a long-term immigration reform package that allows immigrant families to come out of the shadows and allows them to further contribute to our community.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's SOAR Immigration Legal Services is prepared to assist qualifying individuals with applying for this new program. SOAR will hold an information session on Tuesday, Nov. 25, at 6 p.m. at SOAR's office (7931 NE Halsey St., Ste. 302, Portland, Ore.) to let individuals know what they can do to prepare. Please go to soarlegal.org for updated information and for additional events.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.