

## Election-year Policy Change: Obama Decision Eases Undocumented Kids' Turmoil

Article By:

Susan Ferriss

---

**Thousands of 16- to 30-year-olds could benefit from relief that will let them work legally, and stop fearing deportation.**

### **A profound change for immigrant youths with no way to seek legal status**

President Barack Obama responds as he is interrupted while announcing that his administration will stop deporting and begin granting work permits to younger illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and have since led law-abiding lives, Friday, June 15, 2012, during a statement in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington Susan Walsh/AP

In a sweeping policy change with political overtones, President Obama has announced that his administration will allow [undocumented youths who grew up here](#) to apply for [work permits](#) and [spare them from deportation](#) if they meet certain criteria.

The policy will not include a path to legal residency, a first step before applying for citizenship, so it differs from the proposed DREAM Act. That proposal once had bipartisan Congressional support but has repeatedly stalled in the face of Republican opposition. Even though the new policy falls short of the path to legal status that immigration activists would like, the change is likely to expand Obama's [appeal among crucial Latino voters](#) in November.

Obama's decision will also have tremendous personal impact on a population of young people who were brought here as children and have no way to pursue legal status, either here or back in birth countries, under current immigration rules.

Certain states, such as California, Arizona, Texas, New York and Florida, are home to significant numbers of these youths. And many of them have anguished over their predicament. They say they have been left with no option but to work with fake identification, or under the table, or drive without a license or not drive at all. Some have been admitted to college but barred from pursuing loans and grants. Others have given up such dreams.

Stories of ambitious students [foiled by their status](#) and with no way to fix it have become a staple of TV and newspaper coverage. A few years back, [college students at Sacramento City College](#) made a

short fiction film about undocumented students who had grown up as Americans only to discover that they were illegal immigrants. Some of the actors were undocumented. The characters talked about their fear of getting stopped by police, as well as their complex feelings about their parents' decision to bring them to the United States.

Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano explains the new criteria [in this memo](#). The policy will be limited to youths who arrived before the age of 16, have lived here continuously for at least five years and who are not older than 30. Criminal backgrounds will disqualify youths from the benefit. Youths must also be in school, have graduated or obtained a GED.

Reprinted by Permission © 2025, The Center for Public Integrity®. All Rights Reserved.

---

National Law Review, Volume II, Number 167

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/election-year-policy-change-obama-decision-eases-undocumented-kids-turmoil>