



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

J. HERBERT NELSON, II
STATED CLERK

Friday, August 04, 2017

Dear Mr. President,

As the top elected ecclesial officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a denomination of 1.3 million members, I write to urge you to ensure and defend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for the remainder of your presidency. We are a denomination in which our national governing body has voted time and again to stand in solidarity and fight for a just resolution of the legal limbo we have seen so many young people confront as they strive to become full participants in U.S. society. I speak particularly about the group of young people who arrived as children, brought to the United States by their parents. DACA has provided these same individuals the opportunity to live without fear and to seek a fuller life.

Because of DACA, approximately 800,000 young people, called Dreamers, have been able to continue their education, enter the military, obtain better paying jobs with better working conditions, and raise families. They have fought tirelessly for their rights and as engaged members of our communities, they exemplify our country at its best. They have also had significant impact on local communities with 48 percent finding jobs with better working conditions, 63 percent finding better paying jobs, 90 percent having received driver's licenses or state IDs, and 12 percent purchasing their first home. These individual improvements compute to local improvements, too.

Many are members of our churches. In my service to the church as pastor to congregations and now in a pastoral role for the entire PC(USA), I have preached to, counseled with, and prayed with people from many walks of life, never thinking of them as anything other than children of God. These young people are not strangers in our congregations, but active members made in the image of God. The Bible teaches us that if one member suffers, we all suffer along with them.

DACA recipients entered this country as children. They often know this country more than the one they have left behind. They have made friends; they have studied in schools; they have dreamed about their future. Though not all "succeed" in the conventional sense—frequently due to discriminatory laws and complicity with various forms of discrimination—as people of faith we are called to walk with all the vulnerable in our society and support them in their struggles.

Rescinding DACA would be an appalling rejection of our faith and our nation's values of compassion and welcome. DACA recipients are mothers, fathers, teachers, nurses, lawyers, scientists, our neighbors, and leaders of a new generation. Made in the image of our Creator, Dreamers and their families are inextricably woven into the fabric of our nation and play an invaluable role in our society. When the immigration system focuses only on enforcement, we close doors to other possibilities. We eliminate the future potential of our communities. We eliminate the possibility of a positive narrative in the public sphere. It speaks against our values as a country and it smacks against our understanding of our faith. We are called to love our neighbor, and so we fervently support DACA recipients and the continuation of the program.

We have heard the clamor of voices in the Dreamers movement. They have not stood by and idled, waiting for change to happen for them. These individuals understand what it means to be an active citizen practicing their own agency, and have long fought for their rights. They are examples of democracy at its core and what the U.S.A. holds dear. I urge you to respond by deciding for positive changes in their lives and in our communities. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will continue to stand by them in solidarity.

In the faith we share,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. Herbert Nelson, II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)