

By Steve Taylor

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## **Bishop Flores: Young people will lose faith in government if DACA issue is not resolved**



BROWNSVILLE, RGV – DREAMers are making a great contribution to the well-being of the Rio Grande Valley and should be allowed to stay permanently, says Bishop of Brownsville Daniel E. Flores.

In an interview with the Rio Grande Guardian and 88FM, Flores praised the contributions of young undocumented immigrants following a news conference held by Valley Interfaith at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Brownsville.

The news conference was called to announce that 10,000 signatures had been collected in support of a pro-DACA petition that will be sent to Congress.

Asked about the DREAMers he sees in Valley churches and in the community generally, Flores said:

*"I hear young people talk about when they came here, very young, many not having a memory of ever living in Mexico. English is practically their first language, although often they are bilingual, which is a blessing.*

*"They have studied here and are already contributing a great deal. Some are studying to be nurses, others to be technicians or engineers. They have already contributed a great deal to the good of the Valley. To find a permanent solution to them will, in a great way, uplift the well-being of the whole community here in the Valley."*

Young undocumented immigrants are sometimes called DREAMers because legislation known as the DREAM Act would have protected them from deportation. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It was an Obama Administration immigration policy that allowed some individuals who entered the country as minors, and had either entered or remained in the country without documentation, to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and to be eligible for a work permit.

President Trump has announced DACA will be rescinded and has given Congress until March 5 to come up with alternative plan that will allow the approximately 800,000 individuals who were enrolled in DACA to remain in the country legally.



It is estimated that there are 10,000 young people in the Valley that would be protected if a replacement for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy is found. Flores believes the trust many young people have in government is on the line as Congress deliberates on DACA.

“Sometimes, you hear a lot of pain because I hear a lot of our young people feel they are caught in the middle of kind of a ping-pong game between competing political forces and that government is not responsive to people and that causes a certain kind of cynicism,” Flores said.



“I think our leaders need to realize that the longer they sort of protract their inability to find a solution, the more it sort of disheartens young people in their ability to hope in the goodness of our political system. That can have long-term consequences. I am saying this affects not just DREAMers but affects a lot of people who just wonder is it possible that we have lost the ability to reach a consensus on basic issues of the human good?”

Flores said he attended Valley Interfaith’s news conference to add his support to the group’s petition.

“I was very happy to recognize many of our parishioners from different parishes who have been working to collect signatures to send to Congress to ask them to act in a way that brings a permanent and just solution for the DREAMers and the DACA situation. So, we have between 9,000 and 10,000 signatures so far that we are going to be sending out to the different representatives here in the Valley,” Flores said.

Flores said the petition will continue to be circulated in Catholic churches around the Valley.

"The process continues. We are simply inviting parishioners that if they wish, to be able to send these cards that really express the voice of many people in terms of simply encouraging our political process not to get stuck in a stalemate, but to try to find a consensus solution that will work in favor of the human beings who are caught in this sort of situation. It is an ongoing effort," Flores said.

"I wanted to thank and recognize the folks who have continued this, especially Valley Interfaith, to bring forward this issue and to help our young people who are affected because up to 10,000 students here in the Rio Grande Valley were affected by the DACA status reality, to encourage them not to lose heart, that together we are going to encourage a just and permanent solution."

Asked if he wished to make any other comments, Flores said: "I am just very grateful for the work that goes on here. I ask people to pray and the church will continue to open up a space, which I think is important for people to let their voices be heard. The work of a Congress is to do its work. I don't legislate for them and neither does the church but we do want them to do their work in a way that is responsive not only to the voice of many people but also the human rights and the justice of these matters."

Eddie Anaya, a Valley Interfaith leader from St. Francis Cabrini in Las Milpas, said that the 10,000 signatures in support of the petition can be doubled or quadrupled through phone calls to Congress. He said U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, Texas' senior senator, would be particularly targeted.

"We are continuing to get more signatures every Sunday. We have not stopped. We are telling parishioners to call these numbers so these 10,000 will multiply to 20,000 or 40,000 calls in addition to the postcards we will be sending out to the congressmen. We are urging people to get involved and call your congressmen, especially Senator Cornyn," Anaya said.

“Here in the Valley we have about 10,000 DACA students that have their permit. We are urging, if your permit is about to expire within the next five months, to renew your DACA. Once you renew it will be good for two years. So, therefore, don’t wait because the March 5 deadline is almost upon us. We do not know what is going to happen. But, you cannot renew it if it does not expire within the next five months.”

Anaya provided the Rio Grande Guardian with a flyer Valley Interfaith is handing out to parishioners. It reads:

We challenge the Valley to join the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops in calling our congressional leaders and telling them we want action on a permanent DACA! Last week the Senate failed to reach the 60-vote threshold to begin open discussion on a permanent solution to DACA. All the while, March 5th is quickly nearing and we need Congress to act as our DREAMers’ situation becomes more uncertain.

Our faith teaches us that we must act to protect the most vulnerable – including our immigrant neighbors. Now is the time for us to call on Congress to act!

Call your Representatives and Senators and tell them we support our DREAMers and want a permanent solution to protect DREAMers from deportation, to provide them a path to citizenship, and to keep intact all existing protections for families and unaccompanied minors.

These are their Washington D.C. office numbers:

Sen. Cornyn (202) 224-2934  
Sen. Cruz: (202) 224-5922  
Rep. Vela: (202) 225-9901  
Rep. Gonzalez: (202) 225-2531

Now is our chance to be heard!