



Valley Interfaith pushes lawmakers to support DACA

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By FERNANDO DEL VALLE Staff Writer

HARLINGEN — Valley church leaders yesterday called on U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar to join the push for a Congressional showdown to decide the fate of the so-called Dreamers.

Valley Interfaith wants Cuellar to follow the example of U.S. Reps. Filemon Vela, D-Brownsville, and Vicente Gonzalez, D-McAllen.

They announced Tuesday they would sign petition by backers of the Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, which President Donald Trump canceled year.

The group's leaders met with Gonzalez's staff on Friday and with Vela on Monday, urging the congressmen to sign the petition.

The announcement brings Congressional supporters of the petition within three signatures of the 218 needed to trigger a House vote on the fate of about 800,000 Dreamers.

"We're glad they made the decision and we have to continue. We have a long way to go," the Rev. Daniel Flores, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, told reporters at a press conference at Queen of Peace Catholic Church here.

"This is a commitment to our young people that they are not alone — to give them the opportunity to do what they want to do to share their talents for the good of the whole community," Flores said. "We seek a permanent solution to the limbo so many (Dreamers) are going through right now."

Rev. Bill Duke, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Mission, called on Cuellar to sign the petition.



Bishop Daniel Flores of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville was one of several speakers who spoke at a press conference hosted by Valley Interfaith in which they discussed local congressman's stance on the DACA discharge petition in Congress and other changes regarding Homeland Security

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Valley Interfaith, which represents churches in the Valley, wants to meet with Cuellar, said Eddie Anaya, a Las Milpas attorney on Valley Interfaith's executive committee.

"We're not going to lose the fight," Anaya said of the push to allow Dreamers to continue their education in the United States. "It's an uphill battle but it's worth fighting for."

Cuellar's office did not respond to messages requesting comment.

On Tuesday, Vela stated he would not vote in support of a DACA bill tied to funding of a border wall.

"In consultation with Dreamers and their parents, clergy and Bishop Daniel Flores, I have decided to sign the discharge petition so that Dreamers can get the vote they are requesting," Vela stated. "I will vote for a clean Dream Act, but not for any measure that includes border wall funding."

Yesterday's press conference followed a February event in which Valley Interfaith sent out 10,000 postcard-styled petitions urging lawmakers to support the so-called Dream Act.

Family separations

Yesterday, Valley Interfaith leaders also spoke out against a new federal order calling for the prosecution of all persons illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

Since Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the order May 7, hundreds of children have been separated from their parents.

"We must fight for a solution that keeps families together," Duke said at the press conference. "Any bill that separates families is unacceptable and, in my opinion, immoral."

Now, a law authorizes the Department of Homeland Security to reject immigrants if they are or are likely to become a "public charge" — dependent on government assistance.

Currently, the law exempts many programs, particularly those supporting immigrant children who are U.S. citizens and eligible.

Under the new proposal, programs such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, food stamps, subsidized health care under Obamacare and Head Start education programs would serve as demerits against immigrants' applications for legal residency.

"It will make parents decide between putting food on the table and applying for citizenship," Anaya said.

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