

## IMMIGRATION

## Uncertainty around DACA creates 'perfect breeding ground' for misinformation

Online misinformation about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals has existed since it began. With the program in court again, advocates fight a new wave of false information.



NBC News; Getty Images

June 11, 2023, 6:30 AM EDT

**By Nicole Acevedo**

The uncertainty around the fate of DACA, the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) program, has created "a perfect breeding ground" for misinformation to flourish online, advocates say.

[More than 580,000 DACA recipients](#) have been living with uncertainty around the Obama-era program amid a six-year legal battle from the Trump administration as well as from nine

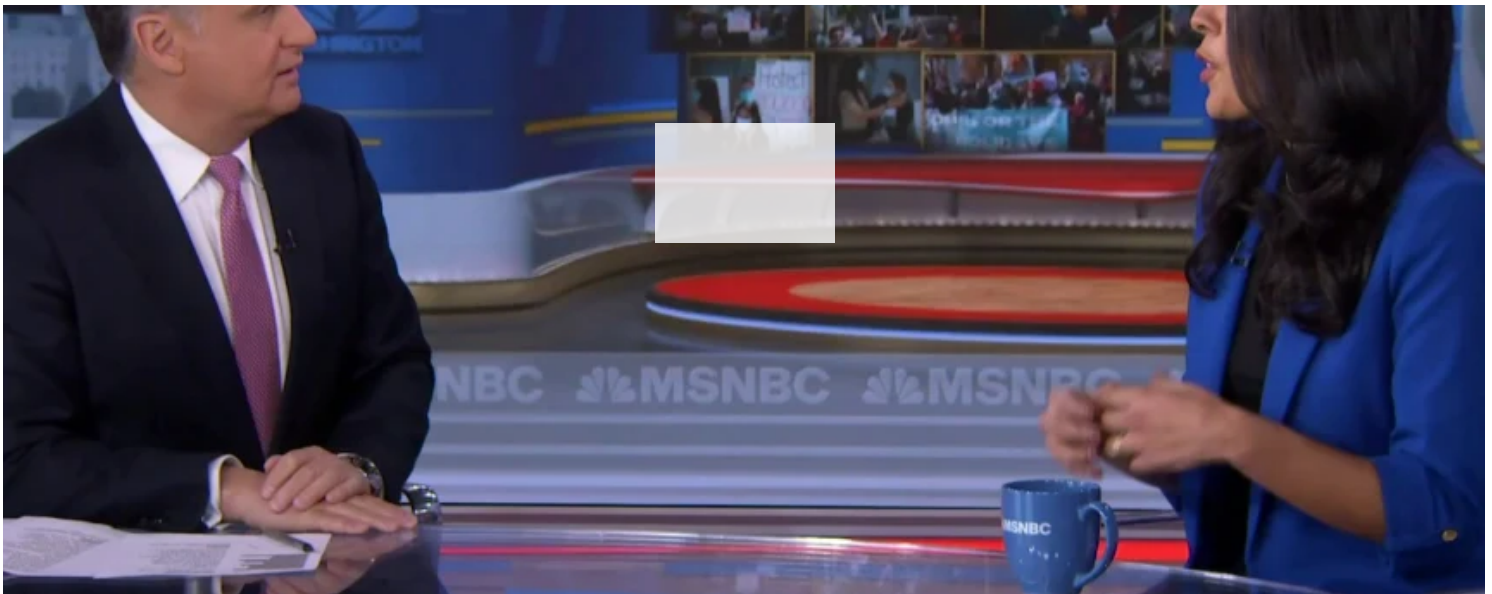
Republican-led states.

DACA, which will mark [its 11th anniversary](#) on Thursday, has allowed eligible young immigrants who lack legal status after having been brought to the U.S. as children to work and study without fear of deportation.

The legal back and forth has not only created an unpredictable situation for DACA recipients, it has also become "a perfect breeding ground for bad actors to push this misinformation," said José Muñoz, a DACA recipient and deputy communications director at United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth-led organization.

Every time news about DACA arises it is followed by "big peaks" of online chatter that often become vehicles of "harmful narratives," Muñoz said. Some of these narratives can lead to people into "incorrectly assuming that they can't renew their DACA, or that DACA has ended for whatever reason."

#### 'Pain and angst': DACA recipient describes legal limbo of immigration program's future



While a federal judge blocked the availability of DACA for new applicants, current recipients or those whose DACA status expired less than a year ago [can continue to renew](#) it every two years.

Those who miss the window to renew would need to reapply as new applicants, which is not allowed currently. This can threaten their ability to continue [studying, working and accruing savings and financial benefits](#).

Misinformation about DACA is oftentimes spread online by "well-meaning people" such as relatives and acquaintances who are either speculating about the legal challenges or "unknowingly sharing things that are untrue" on WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and on private DACA-related Facebook groups, three advocates working to counter misinformation about the program told NBC News.

An overwhelming majority of DACA recipients trying to navigate this confusing landscape were born in Mexico and other Latin American countries. The average DACA recipient is 26 to 28 years old, according to Gaby Pacheco, the [director of advocacy, development and communications](#) at TheDream.US, an organization that helps "Dreamers," those brought illegally to the U.S. as children and named for the never-passed DREAM Act, complete college degrees.

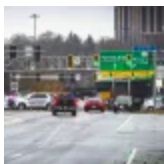
While social media platforms have made information more available to people, they have also amplified the [viral nature of false information and unscrutinized sources](#). This has created a space for misinformation to spread widely online, particularly in group chats and other social media platforms commonly used across [Latino communities](#).

## Disinformation, scams lead to 'heartbreaking' situations

There are also instances of "targeted disinformation" coming from scammers or others trying to take advantage of the uncertainty for monetary gain, advocates said.

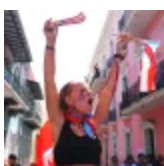
### Recommended

---



U.S. NEWS

**2 dead after vehicle crashes into Rainbow Bridge checkpoint and explodes at U.S.-Canada border in Niagara Falls**



CULTURE & TRENDS

**Puerto Ricans are pushing to make these unique slang words officially Spanish**

One of the groups most vulnerable to disinformation leading to scams are the roughly 93,000 first-time [DACA applicants who have been in limbo](#) since 2021, when the program was closed to new registrants until the lawsuit filed by Republican-led states made its way through the courts.

It's been more than two years since those first-time applicants submitted the necessary paperwork and paid the [required \\$495 fee](#) to apply to the program. But their applications won't be processed until the ruling that closed DACA for new registrants is reversed.

Astrid Silva, a DACA recipient and an immigration activist who co-founded the nonprofit group [Dream Big Nevada](#), which supports Nevada's undocumented youth, said she has received calls from many of these applicants and their family members who have seen Facebook posts falsely claiming that the processing of first-time applications can be expedited by paying an additional fee.

Silva advised them to check the [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) website to see the status of their applications.

"When they check it, I'm the bearer of bad news because they had that hope that the \$300 they paid was going to expedite their case and it wouldn't be frozen anymore," Silva said. "To me, that's heartbreaking."

Silva has also seen a lot of misinformation on TikTok, with people falsely claiming that DACA had reopened for new applicants.

"DACA has opened 30 times already, according to TikTok," Silva said.

Muñoz said United We Dream has been monitoring these and other kinds of DACA misinformation online since the program first started almost 11 years ago.

Back then, individuals committing [notario, or notary fraud](#), was a big source of misinformation, Muñoz recalled.

These individuals would pretend to have legal credentials they didn't have. They created scams to target young immigrants and their families, including charging fees for DACA applications without verifying if the person was eligible and giving false information about recent changes and legal challenges to the program.

Currently, most of the misinformation centers on the legal court challenges, Muñoz said.

"The misinformation, a lot of it starts in the confusion," he said, using the [most recent court hearing about DACA](#) as an example. "What does the hearing mean? What's going to happen? When is there going to be a ruling?"



On June 1, attorneys representing DACA recipients and the Republican-led states suing to terminate DACA returned to court to debate a recent [Biden administration rule](#) that turned the program into a [federal regulation](#) to increase its chances of surviving legal challenges. The Texas federal judge who heard the arguments is expected to issue a decision on the legality of the Biden rule this year.

Some of the students Pacheco helps saw posts on Instagram falsely claiming that DACA was going to end immediately after the June 1 court hearing in Texas. Mixed information about the court hearing's actual date also surfaced. The students came to Pacheco for guidance.

"One of the students, I could see, she was like shaking and scared," Pacheco said. "They're tired and fed up of having to live, not just in two-year increments at a time, where they have to fill out their DACA and renew it, but also court hearing to court hearing."

## Best antidote is 'good information'

Muñoz anticipates the "next peak" of misinformation will come whenever the federal judge in Texas issues his ruling based on the arguments discussed during the [June 1 court hearing](#).

Attorneys from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, or MALDEF, who represent DACA recipients in the case, have said that the judge's decision, regardless of what it is, will most likely be appealed.

Appeals mean that the case will continue to play out in the court system for a longer time period. The case could eventually end up before the U.S. Supreme Court for a third time.

Muñoz said United We Dream is ready to monitor online misinformation on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. The exercise helps the organization strategize how to best counter the misinformation with [factual information](#).

"The best antidote to misinformation is good information," Muñoz said. "The sooner that you can have the right information out there, in ways that people can understand and share, the better you're going to be equipped to push back against some of the disinformation."

Congress "really needs to find a permanent solution" for the immigration status of DACA recipients, said Pacheco, who is a former DACA recipient.

Having a more permanent solution to DACA, she said, would help reduce the misinformation connected to the court hearings because of the uncertainty that surrounds them.



Nicole Acevedo

Nicole Acevedo is a reporter for NBC News Digital. She reports, writes and produces stories for NBC Latino and NBCNews.com.

[ABOUT](#)[CA NOTICE](#)[CONTACT](#)[TERMS OF SERVICE \(UPDATED JULY 7, 2023\)](#)[HELP](#)[NBC NEWS SITEMAP](#)[CAREERS](#)[CLOSED CAPTIONING](#)[AD CHOICES](#)[ADVERTISE](#)[PRIVACY POLICY](#)[SELECT SHOPPING](#)[YOUR PRIVACY CHOICES](#)[SELECT PERSONAL FINANCE](#)

© 2023 NBC UNIVERSAL

[NBC NEWS](#)[MSNBC](#)[TODAY](#)