

Faith groups react to Supreme Court ruling against Trump on DACA

by [Jack Jenkins](#) in the [July 15, 2020](#) issue



Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipient Roberto Martinez (left) celebrates with other DACA recipients in front of the Supreme Court on June 18 in Washington, DC. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

Faith groups are applauding the US Supreme Court's decision temporarily halting the Trump administration's efforts to rescind an Obama-era program granting legal protection to hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants who were brought to this country as children.

The 5-4 decision, written by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and handed down on June 18, blocked the Trump administration's efforts to "wind down" the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which was created by President Obama in 2012 to shield qualified young immigrants from deportation.

The decision hinged on a technicality: it did not prohibit the federal government from rescinding the program but rather ruled that it did so improperly.

“We do not decide whether DACA or its rescission are sound policies,” Roberts wrote.

Even so, faith groups from across the religious spectrum hailed the ruling as a win for undocumented immigrants.

Samuel Rodriguez, head of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and a spiritual adviser to President Trump, praised the decision.

“Today’s Supreme Court decision gives a much-needed reprieve to the many DACA recipients in our churches and communities who have been stuck in legal limbo waiting for our nation to recognize that America is their rightful home,” he said in a statement.

However, Rodriguez also criticized Congress for not taking action to write the program into law.

“Yet we cannot lose sight of what’s really not working here: this was the job of Congress, not the executive or judicial branch,” he said. “It’s time for Congress to do their job and to fix our broken immigration system.”

Leaders within the US Conference of Catholic Bishops—which filed an amicus brief in the case in support of DACA—published a statement welcoming the decision and urging the president to abandon efforts to undo the program.

“We urge the President to strongly reconsider terminating DACA,” read the statement. “In times of uncertainty, let us remember the teachings of the Gospel which encourage us to be open and receptive to those in need: ‘If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?’ (1 John 3:17). In this moment, we must show compassion and mercy for the vulnerable.”

Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, also lauded the decision, saying in a statement that “today’s important decision must be reinforced by legislation that ensures our immigrant neighbors can continue to pursue educations, develop careers, raise families and worship alongside us without constant threats of deportation.”

Eaton, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and Jonah Dov Pesner of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism all echoed Rodriguez's desire for Congress to take action. They pointed to the American Dream and Promise Act, which passed the House of Representatives in June 2019 and would provide legal status and a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients.

"Each year on Passover, we read the story of how our ancestors defied the cruel demands of the capricious Pharaoh and pursued freedom for our people," Pesner said in a statement. "We are commanded to read the Exodus story as if we ourselves come out of Egypt, and in doing so, we recognize the plight of others yearning to find shelter. Though we are pleased with today's decision, we remain strongly committed to working in solidarity with DREAMers to ensure their ongoing safety and security in the United States."

Nihad Awad, head of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said the decision was "great news" and pushed for further action by lawmakers.

"America is the only home for the #DACA dreamers," he tweeted. "They build America every day. It should stand by them by offering them not only the right to stay, but citizenship."

According to a 2019 survey from the Public Religion Research Institute, majorities of almost every major religious group support DACA. Religiously unaffiliated Americans were the most supportive (75 percent), followed by Hispanic Catholics (72 percent), white mainline Christians (63 percent), black Protestants (61 percent) and white Catholics (53 percent). Only white evangelical Protestants did not exhibit majority support for the program, with only 44 percent backing it in the survey.

According to the survey, 63 percent of all Americans support the program. —Religion News Service