

NINA MOINI: When federal immigration enforcement ramped up in Minneapolis earlier this year, many immigrant families went into hiding, afraid to leave home for work, school, or even the store. Months later, some of those families are facing a new challenge. Because they lost income during the surge, they're struggling to pay hundreds of dollars in fees to renew their DACA protections and work permits.

Chabeli Carrazana is an economy and childcare reporter for The 19th, who recently reported on how these financial pressures are affecting some immigrant parents in Minneapolis. Thank you for being here and sharing your reporting with us, Chabeli.

CHABELI Oh, thanks so much for having me.

CARRAZANA:

NINA MOINI: You talked to people about not being able to afford renewing their DACA status. Just for starters, can you remind folks who might not be familiar, what does DACA provide? And what happens if someone's unable to renew that status?

CHABELI Sure. So DACA is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This is a policy that allows people who came to the
CARRAZANA: United States as children to apply for a work permit. That protects them here in the US from deportation. And so folks have to renew those applications every two years to keep them current. It's a pretty expensive process.

It's about \$550 for the application itself. There's no way to waive those fees, or there's very rare exceptions to waive those fees. And so it's a substantial burden for families every two years or the folks who have DACA. But it is a really important policy that keeps them legally in the United States with that work authorization.

NINA MOINI: How did you end up narrowing in on DACA and DACA recipients? Just being you, you report on child care. You were following what was going on here in Minnesota. What stood out to you about this particular situation that people find themselves in?

CHABELI Yeah, we came to this story, we've been reporting on Minnesota for several months from the childcare angle.
CARRAZANA: That's what started basically everything back in December. And one of the folks we talked to at the start of the year was this woman who was running a mutual aid effort. She was getting breast milk donations to families where the mother had been detained, and they had left a baby behind that needed breast milk.

And so we've stayed in touch with her over the months. She has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to help folks. And she was the one who let us know, hey, the new thing that I'm hearing over and over again is their DACA is lapsing. And they don't have the money to pay for it this time around because they were in hiding. Because they didn't go to work, they lost income, and they drained their savings.

NINA MOINI: It's so hard, right, because I feel like you talked to someone who came to the country at five years old. But then for folks who may not remember, there aren't really paths to citizenship, as I understand, for DACA recipients. It's this limbo of every two years. And every two years, they're relying on that. And now there seems to be a lot more fear around it. But can you explain what the requirements exactly are to renew DACA? And is it more expensive beyond that \$500?

CHABELI Yeah, absolutely. I mean, this is a lifeline for these folks. And so it's a renewal application process. They have to show where they're working and some of those credentials. And oftentimes, they're working with an attorney to do these applications because they want to make sure it's exactly right. They don't want any delays. It does take a couple of weeks, even up to generally about two months for it to come back. So they want to make sure they're getting it exactly right.

These are folks who cannot afford to have lapses in their work history. They need to be working. They need to be able to stay in the country. And so this has been a really tough situation because some of the folks I spoke to said, I had to choose between, do I pay my rent to keep my children housed, or do I pay my application fees? And they chose their rent, right? A lot of the folks I spoke to are single mothers. And so it's been a really, really difficult time for them.

NINA MOINI: Do you have a sense for, Chabeli, how their financial situations have gone in the last six months or so, or since the surge sort of died down, at least visibly? Do you see people getting further into financial struggles?

CHABELI I think that's certainly the case for some folks. I'll give you the example of one of the mothers I spoke to. She has been here in the US since she was 14 years old. Didn't work for three months. She went out of her apartment one morning in January, and ICE agents chased her down. She went back inside her home and stayed there essentially for three months.

And so now what she's doing is she's picking up any odd job cooking, selling food on the weekends, working hotel cleanups, I mean, doing whatever she can because she doesn't have that work authorization, right? She needs to do these under-the-table jobs. It's the only option for her. And so it's this compounding effect of she was not able to renew her DACA. And because of that, she cannot get stable work. And so it's taking longer to be able to get those funds to be able to finally send in that application.

NINA MOINI: Did these parents talk to you at all about the toll that this has taken, not only on themselves, but on their children?

CHABELI Absolutely. I mean, I think there's been well-documented research on the impact this is all having on kids. I spoke to one mother. She's been here since she was five years old. And I can't imagine her situation. I've been in the United States since I was five years old from--

NINA MOINI: Me too!

CHABELI --came here from Cuba. Yeah. And so this is the only home she's known. And so her DACA is about to lapse in September. She knows that she doesn't have the funds to pay for it. And so she had to fill out a form for her two girls, who are in elementary school. If she were to get deported because she no longer has her DACA protection, her girls would then be taken care of by a teacher. And the girls are old enough to understand what's happening. They're asking questions. They see the strain.

And I think this is really a story of the long tail effects of what happened at the beginning of the year. Just because we're not seeing these mass roundups anymore doesn't mean that folks are not still hurting from the long-term impact of that metro surge.

NINA MOINI: You talked about some of mutual aid efforts and some of the advocacy organizations that, for a long time, the focus was get through the surge or then trying to keep people from being evicted. Are you seeing resources shifting into this procedural area and helping people to get their status together?

CHABELI
CARRAZANA: Yes, absolutely. When we talked to local organizations, this was not a surprise to them, right? They had already heard about people struggling with their immigration application fees. But they don't have the funds that they did in February, March, April. A lot of donations flooded into Minneapolis at the start of the year, as we all know. And that has dwindled significantly since I talked to one organization that is helping with rent assistance. And they told me they're down to their last \$5,000.

So what they're doing, because they are hearing about these immigration needs, is telling people, OK, we can help you with rent, and that should free up some of your funds to then be able to fill out these fees. And so trying to help them that way is what we've heard. But, yeah, this is the twofold effect of the donations have now dwindled pretty significantly. And so the recourse or the places that folks can look to for aid have also dwindled.

NINA MOINI: And just lastly, Chabeli, what happens if someone really cannot afford to fill the paperwork out, to renew their DACA status? Do they go further into the shadows? Or have you seen people in that situation?

CHABELI
CARRAZANA: So at that point, you're very vulnerable, right? You no longer have your legal protected status. You no longer have your work permit. And what we heard from some folks as well is, well, maybe I was not detained or deported at the beginning of the year when ICE was in town, but maybe now I will have to be forced to move back to this country that is unsafe, it's the reason I left it, because I cannot afford to live in the US anymore. I don't have an income. I don't have savings. I can't pay for rent.

We know evictions are up. We know that folks attending food pantries, that has gone up. And so the need has gotten so much bigger. And we are hearing of these sort of self-deportation situations where people are just saying, I just can't afford to live here. And so they're leaving a different way.

NINA MOINI: And how are you reflecting on childcare, which you cover all the time, which is such a huge expense, as we all know, for anyone who can even afford it, but how that sort of ripples into other areas of people's financial lives?

CHABELI
CARRAZANA: Yeah, so many of the folks we spoke to are single moms, who oftentimes, their partners were the ones who were detained. They were in more of these front-facing jobs where a lot of these ICE roundups happened. And they're left with their children. And that's another thing that we heard from them is, how do we pay anyone to care for my kids?

They're having to cut corners, maybe put their children in unsafe care or unlicensed care or different kind of care situations that are not ideal because the cost of childcare, as we know, is astronomical for just about any family, and certainly for these lower income families who are just trying to get by and pay their rent, much less child care.

NINA MOINI: Chabeli, we really appreciate your time. We hope you'll join us again. And thanks for sharing your reporting with us.

CHABELI
CARRAZANA: Oh, thank you all so much. Appreciate it.

NINA MOINI: That was Chabeli Carrazana, economy and childcare reporter for The 19th.