

CCS Family Immigration partnering with attorneys and organizations to provide help for DREAMers

Catholic Community Services of King County program, Catholic Immigration Legal Services (CILS) / CCS Family Immigration is partnering with local community based organizations and local attorneys to serve the DREAMers in Skagit and Whatcom Counties in Washington state.

On August 15, 2012, the Obama administration will begin accepting applications for Deferred Action from eligible, young immigrants who have become known as DREAMers.

This initiative, announced by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano on June 15, offers a two-year, renewable reprieve from deportation to unauthorized immigrants who are under the age of 31; entered the United States before age 16; have lived continuously in the country for at least five years; have not been convicted of a felony, a "significant" misdemeanor, or three other misdemeanors; and are currently in school, graduated from high school, earned a GED, or served in the military. Immigrants who meet these criteria are commonly referred to as "DREAMers" because they comprise most (though not all) of the individuals who meet the general requirements of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Deferred Action is an administrative remedy which serves to defer their deportation and allows young DREAMers to stay in the United States with their families, finish their education, and even work legally.

According to the Immigration Policy Center, there are approximately 1.4 million immigrants currently in the United States who might meet the requirements of the deferred action initiative, either now or when they are older. Washington State is one of the top ten states with the most potential beneficiaries, with an estimated 27,490 potential beneficiaries (<http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/who-and-where-dreamers-are>).

The DREAMers will need legal assistance to help them through the complicated U.S. immigration system. Skagit and Whatcom Counties currently have some of the largest numbers of potential applicants. In response to this great need and tremendous opportunity for our immigrant neighbors, Catholic Immigration Legal Services (CILS) / CCS Family Immigration, the Skagit Immigrant Rights Council (SIRC), Community to Community (C2C) in Whatcom County, American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) and local immigration attorneys have joined together to provide informational sessions and clinics to assist immigrant youth apply for this benefit.

Additionally, local advocacy groups have already received reports of unscrupulous operators making fraudulent claims of instant legalization. The informational sessions and clinics will help protect a vulnerable population against such fraudulent practices. To meet these two goals, the collaborative group has scheduled a series of weekly informational workshops in various locations, alternating between Skagit and Whatcom Counties.

The informational sessions and clinics are scheduled for August 28th in Bellingham and September 8th in Mount Vernon. For details on Skagit County events, contact Donna Rieper, Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) Representative / Immigration Site

Coordinator at CCS Family Immigration, (360) 416-7095, extension 226. For Whatcom County events, contact Rosalinda Guilin, director of C2C, (360)738-0893.

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