

Washington Post: Terminating DACA during the pandemic would be a callous error in judgment
By Laurene Powell Jobs
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Jirayut Latthivongskorn is waiting for the hospital's beds to fill up.

A family and community doctor, he is part of a team of medical professionals at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital. But [Latthivongskorn, who goes by New](#), is more than a health-care worker on the front lines of the [covid-19 pandemic](#). He's also a "dreamer" — a recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. When New was 9, his family moved from Thailand to the Bay Area, where he became the first undocumented graduate of the University of California at San Francisco medical school.

And if the Supreme Court allows the Trump administration to [terminate DACA](#), New and roughly [29,000 other DACA recipients](#) who are health-care practitioners face the risk of termination and deportation just as a shortage of medical personnel is stretching hospital systems already overburdened by coronavirus.

The role of these health-care workers — and more than 200,000 other dreamers in occupations deemed essential — underscores the stakes of the Supreme Court's imminent decision on DACA. It also highlights a largely unrecognized failure of the administration's slow response to this pandemic: that the [11 million undocumented immigrants](#) in the United States have been left to confront this pandemic without support from the federal government.

Most of these immigrants, a largely invisible engine of U.S. industry, have lived here for more than a decade. They help to care for our sick; they raise our children; they grow, deliver and prepare our daily sustenance. They live in our communities, attending schools and religious services and giving of themselves so that their children and our country have a brighter future. Yet they have been explicitly carved out of our national response to the [coronavirus](#).

Undocumented immigrants and their families, including [more than 5 million](#) children who are U.S. citizens, were [left out](#) of the disaster relief package [enacted last month](#). They are ineligible for direct subsidies despite being overrepresented in the service industries and informal economic sectors ravaged by the pandemic.

And the [10 million unemployment claims](#) filed in March undoubtedly understate the pandemic's real impact on the labor force, because they don't account for undocumented workers who have lost their jobs and remain ineligible for the unemployment benefits designed to keep struggling families afloat.

Meanwhile, amid the public health threat, undocumented immigrants are scared to come forward for testing. [Barred](#) by partisan opposition from buying into health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, they face exorbitant out-of-pocket costs should they decide to seek testing and medical treatment.

Stepping forward would also expose them to the risk of deportation as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement [continues patrols and raids](#) — an especially chilling possibility since detainees are [held](#) in close quarters without adequate sanitation or protection. Although [thousands of doctors](#) have signed a [letter](#) urging that immigrants be released from detention, [nearly 40,000](#) remain behind bars, where the virus could easily spread.

It is a cruel irony that undocumented workers represent most of the labor force in industries that have been deemed essential, such as agriculture, requiring these immigrants to [continue working](#) to feed the Americans sheltering at home across the country. Think about that: Our undocumented workforce risks exposure each day on our collective behalf, while they are simultaneously denied economic relief and shut out of our health-care system.

This is morally abhorrent, and it's self-destructive to the larger aim of stamping out this pandemic. Our health is tied to their health, and our economy is tied to their well-being. When excluding some creates outside risks for all, it is imperative that Congress extend to everyone, regardless of immigration status, any health and economic supports intended to ward off or mitigate the ravages of the virus.

The virus does not discriminate — and neither should the rest of us. As the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. put it, we are all [“tied in a single garment of destiny.”](#) Immigrants must not be left out of Congress's next relief package.

In a [2018 TEDx talk](#), New said he “wanted to become a physician who would change policies and influence the status quo of how health care was delivered.” He is doing that. It would be a mistake for the Supreme Court to deny our country New's contributions just when the United States badly needs them. New's patients don't care where he was born. They just want to get the medical care they need.

Breaking America's promise to dreamers such as New and leaving undocumented immigrants to fend for themselves would be callous and cruel to some of the very people helping the rest of us weather this crisis. It would also be a profoundly myopic error in judgment that endangers the health and well-being of us all.

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