

28 May 2012

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

re: Executive authority to grant administrative relief  
for DREAM Act beneficiaries

Dear Mr. President,

We write as law professors whose teaching and scholarship focus on matters of U.S. immigration and citizenship law. This letter addresses an issue that may arise as agencies and officials within the Executive Branch consider various administrative options in cases involving potential beneficiaries of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

In assessing the options that may be available to the Executive Branch, the threshold question is whether there is executive authority to grant administrative relief. This is the question addressed in this letter. Though your Administration has considered various forms of prosecutorial discretion for individual DREAM-eligible applicants, this letter highlights the administrative authority that is available to potential DREAM Act beneficiaries as a group. We offer no views on the policy dimensions of a decision to exercise or to not exercise this authority. We write only to explain that there is clear executive authority for several forms of administrative relief for DREAM Act beneficiaries: deferred action, parole-in-place, and deferred enforced departure.

***Deferred action*** is a long-standing form of administrative relief, originally known as “nonpriority enforcement status.”<sup>1</sup> It is one of many forms of prosecutorial discretion available to the Executive Branch. A grant of deferred action can have any of several effects, depending on the timing of the grant. It can prevent an individual from being placed in removal proceedings, suspend any proceedings that have commenced, or stay the enforcement of any existing removal order.<sup>2</sup> It also makes the recipient eligible to apply

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<sup>1</sup> See generally T.A. Aleinikoff, David A. Martin, Hiroshi Motomura, and Maryellen Fullerton, *Immigration and Citizenship: Process and Policy* 780 (7th ed. 2012); Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, *The Role of Prosecutorial Discretion in Immigration Law*, 9 Conn. Pub. Int. L.J. 243, 248-65 (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Practitioners have reported that, in recent months, some DHS officials have taken the position that deferred action is available only to individuals who are in removal proceedings. At the same time, these officials maintain that once a removal case has been administratively closed, deferred action is no longer available. This position is inconsistent with DHS’s prior practice. See Citizenship and Immigration Services

for employment authorization.<sup>3</sup> General authority for deferred action exists under Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) § 103(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a), which grants the Secretary of Homeland Security the authority to enforce the immigration laws. Though no statutes or regulations delineate deferred action in specific terms, the U.S. Supreme Court has made clear that decisions to initiate or terminate enforcement proceedings fall squarely within the authority of the Executive.<sup>4</sup> In the immigration context, the Executive Branch has exercised its general enforcement authority to grant deferred action since at least 1971. Federal courts have acknowledged the existence of this executive power at least as far back as the mid-1970s.<sup>5</sup> More recently, this Administration granted deferred action in June 2009 to widows and children of U.S. citizens while legislation to grant them statutory relief was under consideration.<sup>6</sup>

*Parole-in-place* refers to a form of parole granted by the Executive Branch under the authority of INA § 212(d)(5), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5). Under this provision, the Attorney General “may . . . in his discretion parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit any alien applying for admission to the United States.”<sup>7</sup> Parole permits a noncitizen to remain lawfully in the United States, although parole does not constitute an “admission” under the INA. Individuals who have been paroled are eligible for work authorization.<sup>8</sup> Under this express authority, previous Presidents have granted parole to noncitizens who did not qualify for admission under existing immigration law. For example, President Jimmy Carter exercised parole authority

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Ombudsman, *Deferred Action: Recommendations to Improve Transparency and Consistency in the USCIS Process*, July 11, 2011, at 3-4; Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Fact Sheet: USCIS Provides Interim Deferred Action Relief for Surviving Spouses*, Aug. 31, 2009. It is also inconsistent with case law and with DHS’s own regulations. As the Supreme Court has explained, through deferred action: “[T]he INS may decline to institute proceedings, terminate proceedings, or decline to execute a final order of deportation. . . . A case may be selected for deferred action treatment at any stage of the administrative process.” *Reno v. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee*, 525 U.S. 471, 483-84 (1999) (quoting 6 C. Gordon, S. Mailman, & S. Yale-Loehr, *Immigration Law and Procedure* §72.03[2][h] (1998)) (quotation marks removed) (emphasis added); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(14) (describing deferred action as “an act of administrative convenience to the government which gives some cases lower priority”).

<sup>3</sup> *See* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(14).

<sup>4</sup> *See, e.g., Heckler v. Chaney*, 470 U.S. 821, 831 (1985).

<sup>5</sup> *See, e.g., Soon Bok Yoon v. INS*, 538 F.2d 1211, 1213 (5th Cir. 1976); *Vergel v. INS*, 536 F.2d 755, 757-58 (8th Cir. 1976); *David v. INS*, 548 F.2d 219, 223 & n.5 (8th Cir. 1977); *Nicholas v. INS*, 590 F.2d 802, 806-08 (9th Cir. 1979), *superseded by rule on other grounds*, as stated in *Romeiro de Silva v. Smith*, 773 F.2d 1021, 1024 (9th Cir. 1985).

<sup>6</sup> *See* DHS Establishes Interim Relief for Widows of U.S. Citizens, June 9, 2009, *available at* [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1244578412501.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1244578412501.shtm).

<sup>7</sup> Although the INA gives the parole authority to the Attorney General, the statutes creating DHS in 2003 essentially transferred the parole-granting authority to DHS.

<sup>8</sup> 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(11).

to allow Cubans into the United States in 1980.<sup>9</sup> President Bill Clinton did the same in 1994.<sup>10</sup> More recently, this Administration granted parole in January 2010 to Haitian orphans who were in the process of being adopted by U.S. citizens.<sup>11</sup> In May 2010, this Administration adopted the current practice of granting parole to spouses, parents, and children of U.S. citizens serving in the military.<sup>12</sup> Though the text of the statute calls for case-by-case discretion, both historical and current practice make clear that such discretionary judgments may be based on group circumstances.<sup>13</sup> And, as the Supreme Court has made plain, the Administration's use of group circumstances as a basis for decision-making would be entitled to deference.<sup>14</sup>

***Deferred enforced departure***, often referred to as DED, is a form of prosecutorial discretion that is closely related to deferred action. Almost every Administration since President Dwight D. Eisenhower has granted DED or the analogous "Extended Voluntary Departure" to at least one group of noncitizens.<sup>15</sup> As with deferred action, executive authority to grant deferred enforced departure and extended voluntary departure exists under the general authority to enforce the immigration laws as set out in INA § 103(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a).<sup>16</sup> Though Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in INA § 244, 8 U.S.C. § 1254a, has largely superseded the use of DED in practice, DHS's statutory authority for granting DED on bases other than nationality remains intact, and the President retains his inherent authority with respect to DED. Most recently, this Administration granted DED to Liberians in March 2009.<sup>17</sup> Though DED has been used in response to disturbed conditions in specific countries, there is nothing in the statutory authority for DED that limits its use to such situations. Recipients of DED are eligible to apply for work authorization.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See T.A. Aleinikoff, David A. Martin, Hiroshi Motomura, and Maryellen Fullerton, *Immigration and Citizenship: Process and Policy* 520 (7th ed. 2012).

<sup>10</sup> See *id.*

<sup>11</sup> See Secretary Napolitano Announces Humanitarian Parole Policy for Certain Haitian Orphans, January 18, 2010, available at [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1263861907258.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1263861907258.shtm)

<sup>12</sup> See Julia Preston, *Immigration Policy Aims to Help Military Families*, N.Y. Times, August 1, 2010, at A15.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the historical use of the parole power, see, e.g., Arthur C. Helton, *Immigration Parole Power: Toward Flexible Responses to Migration Emergencies*, 71 Interpreter Releases 1637 (Dec. 12, 1994). For examples of more recent categorical grants of parole, see *supra* notes 11 and 12.

<sup>14</sup> See generally *Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, 467 U.S. 837 (1984).

<sup>15</sup> See Ari Weitzhandler, Comment, *Temporary Protected Status: The Congressional Response to the Plight of Salvadoran Aliens*, 64 U. Colo. L. Rev. 249, 256 & nn. 41–43 (1993).

<sup>16</sup> *Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, Local 25 v. Smith*, 846 F.2d 1499, 1510 (D.C. Cir. 1988) (en banc) (opinion of Mikva, J.), *affirming by an equally divided court* 594 F. Supp. 502 (D.D.C. 1984); see also *American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. v. Meese*, 712 F. Supp. 756, 768 (N.D. Cal. 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See *Deferred Enforced Departure of Liberians*, March 23, 2009, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-regarding-deferred-enforced-departure-liberians>

<sup>18</sup> 8 C.F.R. § 274a.12(c)(14).

These three forms of administrative relief differ in their requirements and consequences. In this letter, we do not reach these questions of specific application. Our purpose in writing is more limited and straightforward: to explain that the Executive Branch has the authority to grant these three forms of administrative relief to some significant number of DREAM Act beneficiaries, and that it has done so both historically and recently in similar situations.

Respectfully yours,



Hiroshi Motomura  
Susan Westerberg Prager Professor of Law  
UCLA School of Law\*

David Abraham  
Professor of Law  
University of Miami School of Law

Muneer I. Ahmad  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Yale Law School

Raquel Aldana  
Professor of Law  
University of the Pacific  
McGeorge School of Law

Deborah Anker  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Director, Harvard Immigration and Refugee  
Clinical Program  
Harvard Law School

Angela M. Banks  
Associate Professor  
William & Mary School of Law

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for identification purposes only.

*Signatures continued\**

Melynda H. Barnhart  
Associate Professor  
New York Law School

Linda Bosniak  
Professor of Law  
Rutgers University School of Law-  
Camden

Richard Boswell  
Professor of Law  
University of California, Hastings  
College of the Law

Allison Brownell Tirres  
Assistant Professor  
DePaul University College of Law

Kristina M. Campbell  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Director, Immigration and Human Rights  
Clinic  
University of the District of Columbia  
David A. Clarke School of Law

Stacy Caplow  
Professor of Law  
Brooklyn Law School

Ming Hsu Chen  
Associate Professor  
University of Colorado Law School

Gabriel J. Chin  
Professor of Law  
University of California, Davis School of  
Law

Michael J. Churgin  
Raybourne Thompson Centennial  
Professor in Law  
The University of Texas at Austin

Marisa S. Cianciarulo  
Associate Professor of Law  
Director, Bette & Wylie Aitken Family  
Violence Clinic  
Chapman University

Adam B. Cox  
Professor of Law  
New York University School of Law

Keith Cunningham-Parmeter  
Associate Professor of Law  
Willamette University College of Law

Alina Das  
Assistant Professor of Clinical Law  
New York University School of Law

Johanna K.P. Dennis  
Associate Professor of Law  
Southern University Law Center

Ingrid V. Eagly  
Acting Professor of Law  
UCLA School of Law

Jill E. Family  
Associate Professor of Law  
Widener University School of Law

Niels W. Frenzen  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Gould School of Law  
University of Southern California

Maryellen Fullerton  
Professor of Law  
Brooklyn Law School

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.

*Signatures continued\**

César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández  
Assistant Professor  
Capital University Law School

Lauren Gilbert  
Professor of Law  
St. Thomas University School of Law

Denise Gilman  
Clinical Professor  
Co-Director, Immigration Clinic  
University of Texas School of Law

Jennifer Gordon  
Professor of Law  
Fordham University School of Law

Pratheepan Gulasekaram  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Santa Clara University

Anjum Gupta  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Director, Immigrant Rights Clinic  
Rutgers School of Law - Newark

Jonathan Hafetz  
Associate Professor of Law  
Seton Hall University School of Law

Barbara Hines  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Co-Director, Immigration Clinic  
University of Texas School of Law

Geoffrey A. Hoffman  
Clinical Associate Professor and  
Director, University of Houston  
Immigration Clinic  
University of Houston Law Center

Alan Hyde  
Distinguished Professor and Sidney  
Reitman Scholar  
Rutgers University School of Law

Kate Jastram  
Lecturer in Residence  
Senior Fellow, Miller Institute for Global  
Challenges and the Law  
University of California, Berkeley School  
of Law

Michael Kagan  
Associate Professor  
William S. Boyd School of Law  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Daniel Kanstroom  
Professor of Law and  
Director, International Human Rights  
Program  
Boston College Law School

Kathleen Kim  
Professor of Law  
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

David C. Koelsch  
Associate Professor and  
Director, Immigration Law Clinic  
University of Detroit Mercy School of  
Law

Sylvia R. Lazos  
Justice Myron Leavitt Professor  
William S. Boyd School of Law  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Stephen Lee  
Assistant Professor of Law  
University of California, Irvine

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.

*Signatures continued\**

Jennifer Lee Koh  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Western State University College of Law

Beth Lyon  
Professor of Law  
Villanova University School of Law

Lynn Marcus  
Professor of the Practice  
Co-Director, Immigration Law Clinic  
University of Arizona Rogers College of  
Law

Peter L. Markowitz  
Associate Clinical Professor of Law  
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Fatma E. Marouf  
Associate Professor of Law  
Co-Director of the Immigration Clinic  
William S. Boyd School of Law  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Elizabeth McCormick  
Associate Clinical Professor of Law  
University of Tulsa College of Law

Karla McKanders  
Associate Professor of Law  
University of Tennessee, College of Law

Michelle McKinley  
Associate Professor  
University of Oregon School of Law

M. Isabel Medina  
Ferris Family Distinguished Professor of  
Law  
Loyola University New Orleans College  
of Law

Jennifer Moore  
Regents Professor of Law  
University of New Mexico School of  
Law

Daniel Morales  
Assistant Professor  
DePaul University College of Law

Nancy Morawetz  
Professor of Clinical Law  
New York University School of Law

Karen Musalo  
Clinical Professor of Law &  
Director, Center for Gender & Refugee  
Studies  
University of California, Hastings  
College of the Law

Noah Benjamin Novogrodsky  
Associate Professor of Law  
University of Wyoming College of Law

Mariela Olivares  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Howard University School of Law

Michael A. Olivas  
William B. Bates Distinguished Chair in  
Law  
University of Houston Law Center

Sarah H. Paoletti  
Practice Associate Professor  
Director, Transnational Legal Clinic  
University of Pennsylvania School of  
Law

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.

*Signatures continued\**

Huyen Pham  
Professor of Law  
Texas Wesleyan University School of  
Law

Polly J. Price  
Professor of Law  
Emory University School of Law

Nina Rabin  
Associate Clinical Professor of Law  
Director, Bacon Immigration Law and  
Policy Program  
James E. Rogers College of Law,  
University of Arizona

Jaya Ramji-Nogales  
Associate Professor of Law  
Temple University, Beasley School of  
Law

Jayesh Rathod  
Assistant Professor of Law  
American University Washington  
College of Law

Maritza Reyes  
Assistant Professor of Law  
Florida A&M University College of Law

Ediberto Roman  
Professor of Law &  
Director of Citizenship and Immigration  
Initiatives  
Florida International University

Victor C. Romero  
Maureen B. Cavanaugh Distinguished  
Faculty Scholar & Professor of Law  
The Pennsylvania State University,  
Dickinson School of Law

Rachel E. Rosenbloom  
Assistant Professor  
Northeastern University School of Law

Kevin Ruser  
M.S. Hevelone Professor of Law  
Director of Clinical Programs  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln College  
of Law

Leticia M. Saucedo  
Professor of Law  
University of California, Davis School of  
Law

Michael Scaperlanda  
Edwards Family Chair in Law  
University of Oklahoma College of Law

Irene Scharf  
Professor of Law  
University of Massachusetts School of  
Law – Dartmouth

Andrew I. Schoenholtz  
Visiting Professor of Law  
Georgetown University Law Center

Philip G. Schrag  
Delaney Family Professor of Public  
Interest Law  
Georgetown University Law Center

Rachel Settlage  
Assistant Professor  
Wayne State Law School

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.



*Signatures continued\**

Ragini Shah  
Associate Clinical Professor of Law  
Suffolk University Law School

Rebecca Sharpless  
Associate Clinical Professor  
University of Miami School of Law

Dan R. Smulian  
Associate Professor of Clinical Law  
Safe Harbor Project  
BLS Legal Services Corporation  
Brooklyn Law School

Gemma Solimene  
Clinical Associate Professor of Law  
Fordham University School of Law

Jayashri Srikantiah  
Professor of Law &  
Director, Immigrants' Rights Clinic  
Stanford Law School

Juliet P. Stumpf  
Professor of Law  
Lewis & Clark Law School

Maureen A. Sweeney  
Clinical Instructor  
Immigration Clinic  
University of Maryland Francis King  
Carey School of Law

Margaret Taylor  
Professor of Law  
Wake Forest University School of Law

David B. Thronson  
Professor of Law  
Michigan State University College of  
Law

Enid Trucios-Haynes  
Professor of Law &  
University Faculty Grievance Officer  
Brandeis School of Law  
University of Louisville

Diane Uchimiya  
Professor of Law  
Director of the Justice and Immigration  
Clinic  
University of LaVerne College of Law

Katherine L. Vaughns  
Professor of Law  
University of Maryland Francis King  
Carey School of Law

Prof. Sheila I Vélez Martínez  
Immigration Law Clinic  
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Leti Volpp  
Professor  
University of California, Berkeley  
School of Law

Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, Esq.  
Clinical Professor and  
Director, Center for Immigrants' Rights  
The Pennsylvania State University  
The Dickinson School of Law

David P. Weber  
Associate Professor of Law  
Creighton Law School

Jonathan Weinberg  
Professor of Law  
Wayne State University

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.

*Signatures continued\**

Deborah M. Weissman  
Reef C. Ivey II Distinguished Professor  
of Law  
University of North Carolina School of  
Law

Virgil Wiebe  
Professor of Law  
University of St. Thomas School of Law  
(Minneapolis)

Michael Wishnie  
William O. Douglas Clinical Professor of  
Law and  
Director of the Jerome N. Frank Legal  
Services Organization  
Yale Law School

Elizabeth L. Young  
Associate Professor of Law  
University of Arkansas School of Law –  
Fayetteville

---

\* All institutional affiliations indicated for  
identification purposes only.