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## Many get ready to apply to stay in U.S.

by **Perla Trevizo**  
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Rebecca Lopez, 9, of Harrisonburg wears a cap and gown as supporters of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) march through downtown Harrisonburg, Va. from Blessed Sacrament Church on Wednesday, June 9, 2010.

Photo by **Associated Press** /Chattanooga Times Free Press.

Leonardo is ready.

He has collected his birth certificate, school report cards, awards and any other documents he can find that can prove his age, that he has been in the United States at least five years and that he came here before his 16th birthday.

Armed with those, he is ready to file his application for a grant of relief from deportation as soon as the government gives him the green light Wednesday.

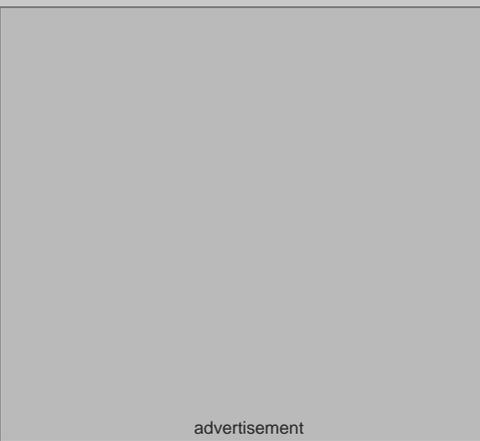
The 21-year-old Mexico native, who asked that

### DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS

On June 15, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano announced that certain people who illegally came to the United States as children and meet other key guidelines may be eligible to go to school or work temporarily without fear of deportation.

On Wednesday, people may begin to request consideration of deferred action for childhood arrivals, which can be renewed every two years.

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only his first name be used because he still fears retaliation because of his unauthorized status, has been in the United States since he was 6 years old.

On June 15, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano announced people who came to the United States as children and meet other criteria may be eligible to stay temporarily without fear of being shipped home.

Known officially as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, it doesn't provide lawful status or a pathway to permanent residence or citizenship for illegal immigrants.

With four days to go before applications are accepted, area and state organizations are scrambling to put together information packets and hold community forums to tell potential "dreamers" about what they need to do to file their requests.

They are often referred to as dreamers because of the Dream Act, federal legislation that would provide a path to legal status to immigrants brought to this country without authorization as children. The legislation has failed to pass Congress several times.

"We've done our best to create packets of information and have information available on our website, but this happened so fast," said Eben Cathey, spokesman for the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. "There are a lot of students who need this service, and we are struggling to make sure that everybody who needs it has access to the information."

As many as 1.8 million unauthorized immigrants may be eligible to apply for the grant, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think-tank dedicated to the study of movement of people worldwide.

Of those, about 60,000 are in Georgia -- among the top 10 states for illegal immigrants -- and 10,000 to 20,000 more are in Tennessee.

Leonardo said he was having lunch with a friend back in June when he saw news about the announcement on CNN.

"At first I didn't know if it was true or if they were going to overturn it," he said.

When he realized it was actually happening, it was a big weight off his shoulders "because I knew I would be able to pay college tuition at a cost I can afford instead of paying what I'm paying right now," he said.

He studies at Dalton State College, where he pays for his out-of-state tuition with money from odd jobs, mowing lawns or working on farms. A 12-hour semester is about \$4,700 for out-of-state students compared with close to \$1,600 for in-state.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services released the first details of how the grant program is going to work last week. The forms are not available yet, but the fee will be \$465 and applicants may request a temporary work permit, issued to those who demonstrate an economic necessity.

Locally, La Paz de Dios, an organization that works a lot with the Hispanic community, is organizing

All requests filed before then will be denied.

For more information, call 1-800-375-5283 or visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

### WHO QUALIFIES?

- Be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012.
- Have come to the United States before reaching their 16th birthday.
- Have continuously lived in the United States since June 15, 2007, until the present time.
- Be physically present in the country June 15, 2012, and at the time of the request.
- Have entered the United States without authorization before June 15 or had their lawful immigration status expired as of that day.
- Be currently enrolled in school, graduated from high school, obtained a general education development certificate or have been honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States.
- Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and don't otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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information sessions, but there are no specific dates yet.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there, and we are hoping to address it," said Melody Bonilla, client services director at La Paz.

#### Possible drawbacks

Some potential applicants are just waiting to see what happens.

One of the major concerns of those who have consulted local immigration attorney Terry Olsen is what can happen if the policy is terminated or if it changes, especially with the upcoming presidential elections.

The way the potential beneficiaries see it: "Why should I apply for something that in two years may not exist and I'm giving my information to the government, and not only my information but that of my parents?" he said.

America Gruner, president of the Coalition of Latino Leaders in Dalton, Ga., said that is a worry of many families she talks to, especially since there's no appeal process.

But Alejandro Mayorkas, director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said the information provided on the form will be kept confidential, including that of the applicant's family members or legal guardians.

"While protecting public safety and ensuring national security, we are mindful that there may be individuals who very well may receive a grant for referred action under this effort but may be hesitant to come forward because of fear of revealing undocumented status to the U.S. government," he said. "That's why we've set forth the confidentiality provision, to make sure people come forward who meet guidelines and requirements."

And some of his employment-based immigration clients worry about whether this will place an additional burden on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and lead to a delay in processing current deportation cases.

Mayorkas said the agency will hire additional staff to balance the workload.

Scams are another concern among government officials, community organizations and lawyers.

Immediately following the announcement in June about the grant relief, advertisements were published in different media outlets.

"We just want to be sure folks understand the process and who is eligible," said Bonilla.

Applicants also must go through thorough background and criminal checks and can't have any significant misdemeanors, which includes DUIs, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Some critics, including national groups such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform, call it a "backdoor amnesty." And some opponents of President Barack Obama, who supports the policy, label it a political stunt to woo Hispanic voters before the November elections.

And despite the help that comes with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, people still want a permanent solution, Gruner said.

"We will continue fighting until the Dream Act or comprehensive immigration reform passes," she said, "so people are not left in an uncertain situation."

For Leonardo, two years is great, but he wants to work toward citizenship.

"I was raised here. The U.S. is my home," he said, "and I want to give back to my community."



**about** Perla Trevizo...

Perla Trevizo joined the Chattanooga Times Free Press in 2007 and covers immigration/diversity issues and higher education. She holds a





master's degree in newswire journalism from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid, Spain, and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Texas. In 2011 she participated in the Bringing Home the World international reporting fellowship program sponsored by the International Center for Journalists, producing a series on Guatemalan immigrants for which she ...

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