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Supporting U.S. in federal court, USC-UCLA report underscores urgent, negative effects on American children of undocumented immigrant parents.

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[A joint report from the University of Southern California and UCLA](#), documenting the damage done to American children who live in the shadow of a parent’s unauthorized immigration status, provides systematic evidence for a new effort to turn back court challenges to President Obama’s executive action on immigration.

The report, “Removing Insecurity: How American Children Will Benefit From President Obama’s Executive Action on Immigration,” is being released today in conjunction with the filing of an amicus brief by educational organizations and children’s rights advocates that support the administration’s position in litigation over the President’s plans to shield millions of unauthorized immigrants from deportation. Citing the report as evidence, the brief filed today with the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit argues for immediate implementation of the President’s programs in order to alleviate ongoing and serious harm to more than five million American children, most of them native-born U.S. citizens.

“This research shows how children pay the price for our broken immigration system,” said Wendy Cervantes, vice president of immigration and child rights policy at First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy. First Focus and the American Federation of Teachers were the lead signatories of the amicus brief.

At stake in the case is the Deferred Action to Parents of American Citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents program (DAPA) that would grant permission to parents to remain in the U.S. for three years and to work legally as long as they meet a number of conditions, including residing in the U.S. continuously since 2010 and passing a criminal background check.

Assessing peer-reviewed research by leading developmental psychologists, sociologists, demographers, and scholars in other fields, the USC-UCLA report constructs a broad scientific case demonstrating the life-altering benefits the American children of unauthorized immigrants would receive from the proposed administrative relief. According to the report, studies utilizing

multiple methodologies and varied data-sets have concluded not only that children are paying a substantial cost for a parent’s unauthorized status but also that removing the fear of deportation and allowing parents to work legally can alleviate those costs.

The amicus brief was filed today in *Texas, et al., v. United States et al.*, which originated in a lawsuit that seeks to reverse the executive orders on immigration issued by the President last November that included creation of DAPA. A federal judge blocked implementation just before the initiative was to go into effect in February and now that ruling is under appeal in the fifth circuit, which sits in New Orleans.

“The USC-UCLA report provided extensive scientific evidence to support the argument that the U.S.-citizen children of unauthorized immigrants are suffering immediate and acute harm from the injunction blocking implementation of the DAPA initiative,” said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the [National Immigration Law Center](#), which is coordinating legal strategy among the administration’s allies in the case. “This evidence will provide a powerful and compelling argument before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals as it considers whether to allow the president's immigration initiatives to take effect.”

An estimated 4.5 million American-born children, who are guaranteed legal citizen status by the U.S. constitution, have one or both parents who are unauthorized migrants. Another three-quarters of a million children would benefit from DAPA because they are eligible to become citizens. The report and the amicus brief argue that the public interest is served by allowing these children to grow up without the specter of either a family broken by the deportation of a parent or being obliged to leave their homeland.

“The data are in and they speak loud and clear: the relief proposed by the president will bring very real and immediate benefits to these American children and their immigrant parents,” offered Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, Wasserman dean of the [Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA](#) and one of the report’s authors. “Protecting a parent from deportation is the right thing to do. It immediately and significantly improves these children’s lives now and moving forward, enabling them to contribute productively for decades to come.”

Roberto Suro, a professor at the [Sol Price School of Public Policy](#) at the University of Southern California and lead author of the report said, “By focusing on what is at stake for millions of American children, this report and the amicus brief attempt to reframe the immigration policy debate. Reasonable minds can differ on whether there is blame to attach to the parents. There is no reasonable case to be made for punishing their children. Yet, every day they are being punished.”

Cervantes of First Focus added, “Professor Suro and his colleagues have shined a spotlight on the district court’s failings, but also on Congress’ failure to deliver immigration reform that works for children.”

The report is a joint effort by the [Tomás Rivera Policy Institute](#) at USC headed by Suro and the [Institute for Immigration, Globalization & Education](#) at UCLA headed by Suárez-Orozco. To better understand DAPA’s potential impact, the report’s authors spent several months examining more than 50 recent studies on the children of unauthorized immigrants, including numerous highly-cited scientific works published in some of the most respected academic journals in the world. The result is a broad ranging synthesis of the state of knowledge that was made available to the legal team drafting the amicus brief filed today. In summary the report concludes:

A substantial and growing body of research documents the damage done by living in the shadows of a parent’s unauthorized immigration status. Common sense suggests that the children of such parents will pay a price. What the research shows is the magnitude of that price. Fear and uncertainty breed difficulties evident from early childhood through adolescence and emerging adulthood. The negative effects have been measured in educational achievement, cognitive development and emotional stability. But the research also shows that these negative effects can be reversed and that a parent’s legalization can place these young people on a life trajectory equal to their peers.

“By amassing research from many scholars in many fields, this report makes it clear that what is at stake in *Texas, et al., v. United States et al.* goes beyond the legal issues at hand: An adverse ruling could hurt the lives of millions of American children who would otherwise be the greatest beneficiaries of this policy,” said Hincapié of the National Immigration Law Center.

“Removing Insecurity: How American Children Will Benefit From President Obama’s Executive Action on Immigration,” by Roberto Suro, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, and Stephanie L. Canizales, is available [here](#) for downloading.

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