

News

Taking on the System: ‘Dreamers’ Are Getting Law Degrees

First beneficiaries of DACA are working toward law degrees – but face barriers to practice

By Pat Eaton-Robb
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Denia Perez’s parents brought her from Mexico to the United States illegally when she was 11 months old. Last month, she became among the first of the so-called “Dreamers” to earn a law degree. And now, she and others are using their lawyerly know-how to take on the system so they can legally practice.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows young immigrants who entered the U.S. before 2007 and before their 16th birthday to go to school under temporary renewable work permits, became law in 2012. That means the first beneficiaries have now had just enough time to graduate from high school, get a bachelor’s degree and now, in some cases, a law degree.

The problem: Most states require that practicing lawyers be U.S. citizens or have legal residency status.

Relatively few “Dreamers” have completed law degrees, said Sheila Hayre, a visiting law professor at Quinnipiac University, from whose law school Perez graduated this month. Perez is the



LAUREN TAKORES/RECORD JOURNAL VIA AP

In this May 3 photo, Denia Perez, a student at Quinnipiac University School of Law, poses for a photo on the school’s North Haven, Conn., campus. Connecticut’s Judicial Branch is in the process of changing its rules to allow law students who don’t have legal residency in the U.S. to become practicing lawyers in the state. Perez, who was brought illegally to the United States from Mexico when she was 11 months old and who graduated this month, proposed the change.

only one currently seeking admission to Connecticut’s bar. But she and peers who are also getting law degrees are positioning themselves for a fight.

“It’s just become normal for me to take all these things into consideration when I’m planning what to do with my life,” said Perez, who plans to take the bar exam in July. “But part of me is frustrated and tired of having to jump through all these hoops to continue to live and contribute to this country.”

She testified this

month, three days after graduating, before a committee of the Connecticut bar, seeking a rule change that would allow her to practice law. Several other states, including California, Florida, New York and New Jersey, have already approved similar changes to open their bars to DACA students.

And the American Bar Association, after hearing from DACA students seeking admission to the bar in several states, adopted a resolution in August that urges Congress

to amend federal law, adding language that bar admission should never be denied based solely on immigration status.

“We have invested in these kids,” Hayre said. “So it makes sense to have them contributing to the economy and society as productive members of the community. In a way, it’s a no-brainer.”

But there is opposition. Hans von Spakovsky, a senior legal fellow with the Heritage Foundation, said he finds it inconceivable that anyone who is not a legal resident could be permitted to take an oath to uphold the laws of the United States and join the bar.

“They are in fact in the country illegally and violating federal law,” said Spakovsky, who is a lawyer. “I wouldn’t want someone who is in the country illegally to defend me, because the Department of Homeland Security could swoop in at any time and remove my lawyer from the country, and then where would I be?”

Perez has three younger brothers who were born in the U.S. and are citizens. Her parents have green cards. She is the only member of the family who is not a legal resident.

The rule she wrote would allow admission to the bar for anyone “authorized to work lawfully in the United States.” That would include those on DACA permits.

“I was very impressed with (Perez’s) diligence, her

intellect and her commitment to not only her legal studies, but what she envisioned for herself in being helpful to people who are underserved in our community,” said Anne Dranginis, a former state Appellate Court judge who now chairs the Connecticut Bar Examining committee.

Connecticut’s proposed change will get another review in June at a meeting of state judges. If affirmed, it could go into effect as early as July, Hayre said, noting that in most states the process has been adversarial and taken several years.

But in Connecticut, so far there has been no public opposition. Perez’s proposal is supported by the deans of law schools at Quinnipiac, Yale University, the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Bar Association.

Perez, who grew up in

northern California and has a degree from San Francisco State University, also plans to apply to the bar in New York. She is beginning a two-year fellowship with an organization called Make The Road New York, working with people facing deportation.

She said she feels it’s her responsibility to expand on the work other DACA students have done securing privileges in Connecticut, such as in-state tuition. This year, they successfully lobbied lawmakers for access to public financial aid.

Other DACA students have also tried to change educational policies.

Thomas Kim, a DACA student who pushed for the American Bar Association resolution before graduating from law school this spring, is waiting for confirmation from Oregon’s bar that there will no problem with his admission there.

Obituary: Clarence Gene Watkins

November 10, 1943 - April 19, 2018

Clarence Gene Watkins, peacefully passed on April 19, 2018 at 8:46 p.m. in Portland, Oregon.



Clarence Gene Watkins

He was born on November 10, 1943, in Omaha, Neb.

Shortly after, his family moved to Portland. He lived the rest of his life in NE Portland where he attended and graduated from Jefferson High School.

Clarence was a Veteran and hard worker. He was preceded in death by his father C. G. Watkins, mother Celistia Watkins, and grandson, Richard Dance. He is survived by his two daughters Yvette Washington and Elsyia Watkins, his sister Velma Redeau his brother Kip Watkins, and four grandsons.



**Pastors
Jerry and Annie
Gutierrez invite you
to join us for
service!**

Friday Evenings @ 7:pm

The Double Tree Hotel
1000 NE Multnomah Street
Portland, OR 97232
Across from the Lloyd Center Mall
Free parking at the hotel

**for more information call 503.488.5481
or log onto www.mfhmportland.com**



520 SW 3rd Ave. Portland, OR
(503)796-9250
Avalonflowers@msn.com
avalonflowerspdx.com

Avalon Flowers
Creative, original designs
Anniversaries, weddings, funerals, birthdays!