



Missouri/Kansas Chapter

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ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY PREPARES TO HELP MEMBERS BENEFIT FROM ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION

St. Louis, MO - A wide-ranging group of St. Louis regional leaders, including faith organizations, civic organizations, legal organizations, cultural organizations, business groups, and philanthropists, has come together to assist those in our community who may benefit from the temporary immigration-related measures recently announced by President Obama.

Rebecca Feldmann, Chair of the Missouri-Kansas Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), noted, "Here in the St. Louis region, we believe we need to treat new St. Louisans with respect and welcoming behavior. The new Americans who are eligible to participate under this new program are already our neighbors, parents and community members. AILA and its members are proud to work together with other stakeholders to help make our community the kind of place where diverse people who have lived here for decades and have come from around the world feel valued and want to put down roots."

Included in the administration's plan are some key items:

- Deferred Action for the parents of U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident children who fit the eligibility requirements;
- Expansion of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) to remove the age cap and move the continuous presence date up to January 1, 2010. DACA will now be granted for 3 years (including those with pending renewal applications);
- Ensuring that job-creating entrepreneurs have legal means to enter and operate in the U.S.;
- Creating policies that support U.S. high-skilled businesses and workers;
- Increasing access for university-affiliated businesses to key talent;
- Directing agencies to look at modernizing the visa system, with a view to making optimal use of the numbers of visa available under law; and
- Announcement of a new border security campaign and plan to focus on serious criminal offenders and very recent arrivals.

Ken Schmitt, Advocacy Chair for AILA's Missouri-Kansas Chapter, stated, "Immigrants already contribute significantly to the St. Louis economy. They open businesses, they are customers in local stores, they pay taxes, they keep our school enrollments

up, and even give back to local charities. Study after study has shown that when more of us are able to contribute more significantly, the U.S. economy and in particular, our St. Louis economy gains from the expanded economic activity and tax revenue generated from it. St. Louis will also benefit from the new ideas, vitality and innovations generated when more of our residents participate in the work of building a great community.”

Mr. Schmitt added, “While a lot of the details are still waiting to be filled in, we know that many of these changes will make a real impact. In the metropolitan St. Louis area, we expect approximately 10,000-20,000 people could be eligible to apply for deferred action under President Obama’s plan. However, it is a stopgap measure. While it is an important first step, it’s not comprehensive, and it’s not permanent. It remains up to Congress to take further action.”

Ms. Feldmann warned, “Unfortunately, some scammers will use this new action by the President as a way to dupe vulnerable immigrants, steal their money, and potentially destroy their chances to apply for programs for which they might be eligible. Legitimate St. Louis service providers will be setting up information centers and workshops to assist immigrants who may be able to benefit from this administrative action and there is an effort underway to secure funds and loans to help people apply for these programs. However, at this point in time, no new application forms are available yet and the guidelines that will determine eligibility aren’t yet finalized. Individuals who have questions about the new programs should speak with a qualified immigration attorney.”

This collaboration to administer the new Administrative Relief program has the support of the AILA Missouri-Kansas Chapter, the International Institute of St. Louis, St. Louis University Legal Clinic, Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates (MIRA), the Migrant & Immigrant Community Action (MICA) Project, Casa de Salud, and the St. Louis Mosaic Project.

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The American Immigration Lawyers Association is the premier professional organization representing the collective expertise and talents of over 12,000 immigration lawyers across the United States and internationally. AILA’s Missouri/Kansas Chapter is comprised of nearly 200 immigration attorneys in Missouri and Kansas, largely centered in the St. Louis and Kansas City Metropolitan areas but also found across rural Missouri and Kansas. The Mission of AILA is to promote justice, advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy, advance the quality of immigration and nationality law and practice, and enhance the professional development of its members. AILA and the Missouri/Kansas Chapter are proud to be at the forefront of expertise and advocacy for the best interest of all our community, including its immigrant members.