Petition calls on President Obama to use executive powers to halt millions of deportations

National Day-Laborer Organizing Network and six individual immigrants filed a petition urging Obama to halt deportations of those who would likely be allowed to stay in U.S. if Congress were to reach a deal on immigration reform.

By Erica Pearson / New York Daily News
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A new petition filed with the Department of Homeland Security asks President Obama to use executive powers to halt millions of deportations.

An immigrant rights group on Tuesday raised the pressure on President Obama to use his executive powers to stop millions of people from being deported.

The National Day Laborer Organizing Network and six individual immigrants filed a formal petition to the Department of Homeland Security, arguing the President can use his "extremely broad and virtually unreviewable discretion" to allow millions of undocumented immigrants to stay in the U.S. — as he did in 2012 for those who were brought to America illegally as children.

The petition calls on Obama to protect from deportation those who would likely be able to stay in the country legally should Congress reach a compromise on immigration reform.

"It simply makes no sense, at a time when he says he's optimistic about immigration reform, to be hand-over-fist deporting the very people who would benefit from that reform," said NDLON attorney Peter Markowitz, director of the Kathryn O. Greenberg Immigration Justice Clinic at Cardozo School of Law.

"It's both inhumane and a waste of government resources," he said.

Markowitz said that while only Congress can change immigration laws, the White House's authority to give people relief from deportation is broad.

In 2012, Obama created a special program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals that gives work
permits and social security cards to young people who entered the U.S. illegally as children. The temporary status — which does not lead to a green card or citizenship — must be renewed every two years.

“The principle that allows him to do DACA is the principle that allows him to do much more,” said Markowitz.

Last week, Obama was asked during a White House Google Hangout chat whether he would act on his own to stop deportations.

He said he’s optimistic that reform will come this year, but added: “Obviously, if at some point we see that it’s not getting done, I’m going to look at all options to make sure that we have a rational, smart system of immigration.”

A White House official did not comment on Tuesday’s petition, but said that while deferred action for those who came here as kids was an important way to prioritize immigration enforcement resources, the President is now focusing on a major legal overhaul.

“The bottom line is that we have a broken immigration system and there are not sufficient tools in the federal government’s toolbox to address this problem,” the official said.

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