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FEDERAL JUDGE STALLS OBAMA'S EXECUTIVE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION

By Nathan Koppel and Miguel Bustillo
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A federal judge in Texas issued an order late Monday temporarily blocking a federal immigration program that would have potentially shielded millions from deportation.

U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen of Brownsville, Texas, who was nominated by former Republican President George W. Bush, sided with roughly two dozen states that sued to challenge a program backed by President Barack Obama, claiming it exceeded his authority and violated the Constitution.

Judge Hanen's temporary injunction blocks a program known as Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, which would allow an estimated four million individuals to seek deferred deportation if they have been in the country since 2010, weren't considered an enforcement priority, and had a son or daughter who was a U.S. citizen or permanent resident as of last year. The program has been heavily criticized by members of Congress.

His temporary injunction also blocks an expansion of the program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which was supposed to allow undocumented immigrants to apply to stay and work in the U.S. starting Wednesday.

Judge Hanen's order called for the parties to meet again on Feb. 27 and discuss how to proceed with the lawsuit.

"This injunction makes it clear that the president is not a law unto himself, and must work with our elected leaders in Congress and satisfy the courts in a fashion our Founding Fathers envisioned," Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said in a statement late Monday.

In a statement early Tuesday, the White House defended the executive orders issued in November as within the president's legal authority, saying the U.S. Supreme Court and Congress have said federal officials can establish priorities in enforcing immigration laws.

"The district court's decision wrongly prevents these lawful, common-sense policies from taking effect and the Department of Justice has indicated that it will appeal that decision," the White House statement said.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice declined to comment on the judge's order early Tuesday. The department is expected to seek an emergency stay of the ruling while it pursues an appeal at the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Congressional Republicans upset with Mr. Obama's immigration policies have said they will only fund the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees immigration, if his executive action is reversed. The current funding is set to expire Feb. 27. The White House has said the president's executive action is legal and well within his authority to set priorities over immigration matters.

“Hopefully, Senate Democrats who claim to oppose this executive overreach will now let the Senate begin debate on a bill to fund the Homeland Security department,” without money for the president’s immigration actions, House Speaker John Boehner said in a statement Tuesday morning.

Some legal experts previously said the lawsuit, which is being led by the state of Texas and includes many Republican-led states, seemed to have little chance of success, noting that prior federal rulings have established that immigration is a federal, not state, concern.

Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center, said the ruling deals at least a temporary setback to the dreams of many young immigrants.

“We and legal scholars, both liberal and conservative, believe the president has widespread, established legal authority to make decisions about how to prioritize who will be deported and who will stay in the United States,” she said. “We urge the administration to take swift action to appeal this decision.”

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, formerly the state’s attorney general, has said the state believed it had standing because it was at the “epicenter” of illegal immigration into the country, and Mr. Obama’s actions would require the state to spend millions providing public services to illegal immigrants.

In addition to Texas, the lawsuit includes attorneys general and governors from many southern and mid-western states, and a few northern ones. California and New York filed briefs siding with the Obama administration, as did the mayors of Los Angeles and New York City.