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For Loyola grad student, deportation deferral knocks down internship hurdle

By Antonio Olivo

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Carlos Robles is probably among the first people in the country to apply for a reprieve under the new rules for prosecutorial discretion announced last week by the Obama administration.

A deferral from deportation that Robles, 22, received after he and his brother Mario, 21, were arrested by Border Patrol agents near Buffalo, N.Y., last year expired last week, according to his attorney at the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago.

So, said Robles, a graduate student at Loyola University, the new policy allowing young people a chance for a break from the threat of deportation came just in time. His lawyer submitted his deferral application Friday.

Robles and his brother, both natives of Mexico, were arrested on their way to visit a friend from high school at Harvard University by federal agents conducting a random check.

"We were on the train going from Chicago to Boston," he recalled. "It was 7 or 8 in the morning, and we saw these tall Border Patrol agents on the train who approached us and asked us for our citizenship status. We spent the whole weekend and that Monday in a county jail."

The experience was a reminder for Robles that — despite educational success that now has him pursuing a master's degree in education — his welcome in the country where he has lived for eight years remains tenuous.

Robles said he is constantly confronted by his lack of legal status, most recently while applying for an internship at Chicago Public Schools that would fulfill a field work requirement at Loyola.

After a background search by CPS showed that he had been arrested, a district administrator was skeptical when Robles showed up with the proof that his deportation had been deferred, he recalled.

"She seemed confused and did not know how to handle it," said Robles, who also teaches tennis at his former high school in Palatine.

He said he now plans to pursue the CPS internship again.