

# HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS

Program allowing them to stay in U.S. set to expire

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All of a sudden the walls were shaking.

Stephane Rony Casseus was doing his algebra homework when it happened. The house seemed on the verge of cracking to pieces. His twin sister and a maid ran outside. His grandmother got on her knees to pray, and he cajoled her to get up and come with him.

As they left, he said, "The house was going down."

That was Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in January 2010. The Caribbean nation was hit by a massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake and many aftershocks. The tremors crippled the country's infrastructure and plunged a largely poor population into homelessness. It killed anywhere from 200,000 to 300,000 people, by different estimates.

Casseus, then 11, and his sister, Stephanie, were among the lucky ones who could fly to the United States on temporary visas after their mother sought safe haven for them while the situation improved. They came to live with an aunt in Elmont, and their mother joined them later. They remain here; there is no home for them in Haiti.

Immigrants in their situation were granted "temporary protected status," or TPS, a humanitarian designation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that allowed them to stay past the visas' expiration and get work permits. Haitians who already were here illegally also were permitted to apply for the protected status and remain here.

But the protections, granted during the administration of former President Barack Obama, have an expiration date: July 22.



Stephane Rony Casseus, 19, who lives in Elmont, is among thousands of Haitian immigrants who has temporary protected status.

“Right now, I am going to school, I am paying taxes, I am opening my business, I am working and I am doing everything right.”

— Stephane Rony Casseus, 19

For the 58,706 Haitians living in the United States under TPS as of the end of 2016, the approaching deadline is causing a lot of anxiety, advocates said. They don't know whether they will be welcome to stay or would become deportation targets under President Donald Trump's immigration enforcement policies.

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center, a national non-profit based in San Francisco,

estimates that 9,400 Haitians in the New York and New Jersey metro area have temporary protected status.

For Casseus, it is difficult to think about anything else. He hopes to stay, grow his part-time work as a physical trainer into a business, and make a life here.

"Right now, I am going crazy," said Casseus, 19, a Sewanhaka High School graduate and student at Queensborough Community College.

"If I go back, it would be messing up my future."

#### Documents leaked

Immigrant advocates, already concerned, became more worried in recent weeks. Department of Homeland Security documents, leaked to USA Today and The Associated Press, indicated the agency was considering either not extending the program or inquiring into the criminal records of TPS holders to deny them status.

If temporary protected status ends, "many people will not go back, because they have nothing to go back to," said Mimi Pierre Johnson, president of the Haitian American Political Action Committee of New York, a group based in Central Islip. "You are targeting people who are part of our society and turning them into people who are part of the bro-

ken immigration system."

Critics of the TPS program, intended as a form of relief for countries in distress, said the status has been abused to the point that it is akin to conveying its holders a permanent visa.

"When it starts getting extended out decades, then the 'T' in TPS loses all meaning," said Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group in Washington that favors more restrictive immigration policies.

"The standard seems to be that these countries have to be ideal before people can go back there. But let's be honest, these countries have been far from ideal" before disaster struck," Mehlman said.

A coalition of faith, immigrant and labor rights leaders — including Catholics, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, organized by the advocacy

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group Long Island Jobs With Justice and the SEIU 32BJ labor union — threw its support behind the program.

They asked Republican Reps. Peter King (R-Seaford) and Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) to intercede on behalf of a Haitian community estimated at more than 23,000 people in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

## Call for 18-month extension

Others rallied last week in New York City, and various groups are lobbying for TPS to be extended another 18 months.

“This is a huge concern,” said Assemb. Michaelle Solages (D-Elmont), a Haitian-American whose district includes Haitian neighborhoods in Elmont and Valley Stream. Her office employs Casseus as an assistant.

“The concern is that Haiti still has many issues, whether it’s political unrest, the effects of Hurricane Matthew that happened months ago or this cholera, which is a waterborne disease” spreading there, Solages said. “To say, ‘Sorry, good luck’ and take them out of the country is just cruel.”

Solages’ office hosted a legal clinic yesterday in Elmont, where speakers discussed TPS renewal procedures and advocacy steps that supporters can take in the meantime.

The immigrants’ plight is attracting some bipartisan support in the region.

Zeldin said in a statement that he backs “the extension” along with closer vetting, “especially in the effort to crack down on criminal activity.”

King said he has been in contact with Homeland Security officials about the program. His understanding, he said, is that “a decision has not been made” but may come this week.

Haiti remains “unsettled” and may not be ready to absorb more people, King said, adding, “I am doing what I can for them and I support the extension.”

A statement from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency that handles TPS applications, said the matter is being reviewed and Homeland Security Secretary

John Kelly has not made a decision on Haitians’ TPS.

“The secretary’s decision will be based on a thorough assessment of the conditions in the country; separately, he has asked the staff for detailed information to increase his understanding of how the program operates,” spokeswoman Katie Tichacek Kaplan said. “The two actions are separate and distinct. Criminal data is not a criteria for determining TPS designation or extension.”

Some worry about the impact and precedent a negative decision would set. Tens of thousands of immigrants of several other nationalities, such as Salvadorans and Hondurans, are protected by the same humanitarian program.

## Cost of deportation

Jose Magaña-Salgado, managing policy attorney for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, co-authored an analysis issued this month that found that deporting Haitians with TPS would cost taxpayers about \$469 million nationally and that the corresponding loss of gross domestic product would rise to about \$280 million a year. Those costs would reach the billions if TPS ends for Salvadorans and Hondurans, the analysis said.

“These are individuals working for local and small businesses, contributing to sales, local and state taxes and making contributions to Social Security and Medicare tax funds,” Magaña-Salgado said. “If the administration does not renew Haiti . . . then it doesn’t bode well for Salvadorans and Hondurans” and the impact grows.

Casseus said a forced return would take away all that he and many other immigrants have worked to achieve. His twin sister, he said, is working at a school in Flushing, Queens, and also is a student at Queensborough Community College.

“Right now, I am going to school, I am paying taxes, I am opening my business, I am working and I am doing everything right,” Casseus said. “They are going to send us to failure.”



Firefighters after Saturday’s crash that killed Isaiah Perez, 17. ■ Video: [newsday.com/manorville](https://www.newsday.com/manorville)

## Teenager killed, 2 hurt as car crashes into tree

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A 17-year-old boy set to graduate from high school next month was killed Saturday night and two other teens seriously injured when their vehicle struck a tree in Manorville, according to Suffolk police and the mother of one of the survivors.

Police identified the teenager who died as Isaiah Perez, of Shirley.

Police said the crash occurred shortly before 9 p.m. Saturday when a 1995 Mitsubishi heading west on North Street near South Street veered off the road

and hit a tree.

Police said the car’s driver — identified as Edenilson Trejo, also 17 and from Shirley — had lost control of the vehicle.

Perez was a passenger along with Tyrese Ramseur, also 17, of Bellport, police said.

Trejo and Ramseur were taken to Stony Brook University Hospital where they were being treated for serious injuries, police said.

Perez was pronounced dead at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital Medical Center in East Patchogue.

Tyrese Ramseur’s mother Tiffany Ramseur, 42, said her son and Perez had been “best

friends” for about four years. Both were seniors scheduled to graduate next month.

Ramseur said Perez was a student at Longwood High School and her son attends William Floyd High School. She said she did not know Trejo.

Her son had finished his shift at a Taco Bell restaurant in Shirley right before the crash, Ramseur said. She said her son knows nothing about the death of his friend because he is in the hospital and is “not responsive.”

Detectives are asking anyone with information on the crash to call the Seventh Squad at 631-852-8752.

## 1 dead, 2 hurt in N.J. boat race crash

POINT PLEASANT BEACH, N.J. — Authorities say a crash during a powerboat race at the Jersey shore has left one man dead and two others hurt.

The accident occurred yesterday afternoon during a small boat preliminary event in the Point Pleasant Beach

Grand Prix.

Officials say the Smith Brothers CRC boat went airborne then came down on top of another boat, the Repeat Offender, in waters off Bay Head, sending three men into the water. David Raabe, who was in Repeat Offender, was pro-

nounced dead a short time later.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation. The remaining races were canceled after the crash. Point Pleasant Beach Mayor Stephen Reid said thousands had gathered to watch the races. — AP