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A federal judge's Oct. 3 preliminary injunction blocking cancellation of temporary protected status (TPS) for people from four countries living in the United States is a welcome step, said the executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network.

The ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Edward Chen of the Northern District of California will protect, for now, about 300,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan currently covered by the program who would be deported if it ends.

"The court rightly pointed to problems with the administration's decision-making process in terminating TPS, including possible constitutional violations," Jeanne Atkinson, CLINIC's executive director, said in an Oct. 4 statement.

Last year, the Department of Homeland Security, which administers the program, announced it was ending temporary protected status for recipients from the four countries in late 2018 and throughout 2019, saying conditions in those countries had improved and the migrants could safely return, even as the U.S. Department of State warned against travel to those nations.

Based in San Francisco, Chen ruled in the case Ramos v. Nielsen, filed by the ACLU Foundation of Southern California and other groups on behalf of nine people with

temporary protected status and five U.S. citizen children of temporary protected status holders against the Department of Homeland Security, headed by Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

Chen accused the Trump administration of acting with "racial animus," citing specific incidences for pages in his opinion. He also said the decision was a "departure from the normal procedural sequence during the TPS decision-making process."

"Instead of considering all current country conditions as had been done in previous administrations, the DHS political appointees in the current administration made TPS decisions turn on whether the originating condition or conditions directly related thereto continued to exist, disregarding all other current conditions no matter how bad in ending TPS," he said.

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The administration is expected to appeal Chen's ruling to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Atkinson said in her statement that in addition to legal flaws in the administration's actions, the judge made note of what she called the "Hobson's choice" with which families covered by temporary protected status have to contend.

"TPS holders facing cancellation of the program are weighing unthinkable decisions," Atkinson said. "They are considering whether to bring their children back to countries where rampant violence; inadequate housing; crippled economies; insufficient food and clean water would put their lives at risk, or to break the family apart, leaving children behind without their parents as they return to unstable situations."

CLINIC and other advocates for people covered by temporary protected status have urged Congress to enact legislation that will permanently protect temporary protected status holders and their families.

Congress created temporary protected status in 1990 to allow foreign nationals fleeing humanitarian catastrophes to find safe haven in the United States. Under the law, the secretary of Homeland Security periodically reviews the conditions in these countries and determines whether to extend or terminate that status.