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Protests Brew Over Attempt to Deport a Woman

By NINA BERNSTEIN

The treatment of a pregnant Chinese woman who miscarried twins last week after federal immigration officers in Philadelphia forcibly tried to deport her from New York has become a flash point for planned protest in the Chinese-American communities of both cities, lawyers and immigrant advocates said yesterday.

Richard Bortnick, a lawyer with the Philadelphia law firm of Cozen O'Connor, which is handling the woman's case without fee, said that protest rallies would be held today. He said he had appealed to senators in Pennsylvania and New York to help investigate the treatment of the woman, Zhenxing Jiang, 32, who has said that the officers manhandled her and ridiculed her pleas for medical help until it was too late.

While her husband and sons, 4 and 7, waited in the lobby of an immigration office, unaware of what was happening, Mr. Bortnick said, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers pushed Ms. Jiang into a minivan, bruised her and bumped her abdomen against the backseat and drove her to Kennedy Airport.

He said the officers stopped to eat lunch themselves but gave the pregnant woman nothing to eat during her eight-hour ordeal and cursed her when she cried and told them she was in pain.

By the time they reached the airport, Ms. Jiang was suffering severe abdominal cramps and begging for help in a public waiting area, said John C. Liu, a New York city council member, who called the woman's treatment un-American. Someone called an ambulance, Mr. Liu said, and she was taken to Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, where Mr. Liu visited her after doctors found that the two fetuses she was carrying had died.

No one disputes that under immigration law, Ms. Jiang could have been deported at any time after 2002, when she exhausted her appeals on the denial of her application for political asylum on the ground of China's one-child policy.

But her husband's political asylum case is still pending on appeal, Mr. Bortnick said, and the couple, whose sons were born in the United States and are citizens, have worked legally and paid taxes as Chinese restaurant operators in Philadelphia for a decade.

Ms. Jiang had been allowed to report routinely for years to an immigration office in Philadelphia until last Tuesday, he added.

Ms. Jiang and many of the family's Chinese supporters say the authorities decided to deport her when they learned she was pregnant, to prevent her from giving birth to another United States citizen.

In a statement issued last week in response to a news release from Mr. Liu, immigration officials said Ms. Jiang's "arranged departure to China from J.F.K. International Airport was delayed for medical reasons that were addressed immediately by New York Fire Department emergency medical technicians."

It added: "Following her treatment at a New York hospital, Jiang was released from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody so she could further address her medical needs. Once she is cleared medically, efforts to effectuate her repatriation will resume."

Mr. Bortnick, who is filing a petition to delay her removal, said that when Ms. Jiang's husband, Tien Xiao Zhang, finally learned what had happened and went to the hospital, immigration officers instructed him that his wife should report to immigration headquarters yesterday. Instead, "she has gone missing," Mr. Bortnick said.