

APNewsBreak: Immigration officials offer to shelve 7.5 pct of deportation cases under review

By Associated Press, Published: April 24

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Immigration officials have offered to shelve 7.5 percent of deportation cases under a massive review of the backlogged U.S. system aimed at focusing on deporting more criminals, authorities said Tuesday.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement has offered to temporarily suspend the deportation cases of roughly 16,500 people after reviewing more than 70 percent of the immigration cases pending as of mid-April, according to statistics released by the agency.

ICE officials said 2,700 cases have been shelved. The rest still require paperwork and background checks.

It was not immediately clear how many immigrants had been told of the offer or how many had accepted it.

The Obama administration announced in August that roughly 300,000 deportation cases would be reviewed and non-criminals and those illegal immigrants who posed no public safety or national security threat would likely have their cases put on hold indefinitely.

The move was welcomed by immigrant advocates but reviled by critics who called the program an attempt by the administration to work around Congress.

Since then, however, immigrant advocates have complained the government is offering to apply so-called prosecutorial discretion in too few instances, and that those whose deportation cases are put on the back burner still don't get a work permit.

So far, the approval rate "is a very low number," said Gregory Chen, director of advocacy for the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

"You can't expect people to not be able to feed their families and have some source of income and still survive," he added.

Some say immigrants might do better by trying their luck in immigration court, where, for example, they could seek asylum.

More than half of immigrants whose asylum cases were decided by an immigration judge in the 2011 fiscal year actually won their cases, according to statistics from the Executive Office for Immigration Review, which runs the country's immigration court system.

ICE deputy press secretary Gillian Christensen said the review is ongoing. The main focus is to enable authorities to focus on deporting illegal immigrants with criminal records or those who previously ignored court orders to leave the country.

“This review is designed to allow the agency to make the best use of its limited resources,” she said in a statement.

Of the cases put on hold to date, the vast majority — more than 2,000 — involve immigrants who have lived in the country for a long time and have an immediate relative who is an American citizen. About 175 are children and 180 are college students or graduates who came to the U.S. when they were under 16 and have lived in the country for more than five years, the agency said.

In addition, immigration officials said they are also putting a halt on some deportation orders.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, said some initially thought the program would bring sweeping change to the deportation process but the latest data shows it hasn't turned out that way.

“I'm glad they pulled their punch,” said Krikorian, whose organization favors stricter immigration limits, “though obviously I would have preferred they not do this thing altogether.”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/apnewsbreak-immigration-officials-offer-to-shelve-75-pct-of-deportation-cases-under-review/2012/04/24/gIQAQhHXfT_story.html