

[latimes.com](http://latimes.com)

## A small piece of immigration reform

**The Department of Homeland Security will roll out a pilot program next week intended to speed up the deportation of immigrants with criminal records by weeding out low-priority cases.**

November 27, 2011

Next week, the Department of Homeland Security will roll out a pilot program intended to speed up the deportation of immigrants with criminal records by weeding out low-priority cases. It's a sensible plan, and one that could restore some sanity to a deportation system that wastes time with harmless immigrants and thereby allows dangerous ones to escape its attention.

Under the pilot program, teams of prosecutors in Baltimore and Denver will review all pending immigration cases in those cities and then decide whether to issue temporary reprieves to the elderly, students, children, victims of domestic crimes and those with a close relative who is a U.S. citizen. Reprieves would be limited to those without criminal convictions. If all goes well, the program would be expanded nationwide in January.

Until recently, government attorneys were required, with rare exceptions, to treat immigrants convicted of serious crimes with the same urgency as those who are merely here illegally. The new guidelines will allow them to place the high-priority cases — those involving criminals — on a fast track for a hearing before a judge. At the same time, this could help free up overburdened immigration courts by reducing dockets.

This isn't the first time the Obama administration has promised to implement reviews and prioritize. Last summer, Homeland Security officials pledged to evaluate about 300,000 deportation cases already filed in immigration court. So far, the results have been less than stellar. The American Immigration Lawyers Assn. released a report that found the new rules were applied unevenly. In San Francisco, for example, a 14-year-old boy facing deportation to Mexico because he brought a pellet gun to school received a last-minute reprieve, yet an undocumented immigrant with no criminal history was deported even though he too qualified for a stay because he had spent 22 years here and had a U.S.-born child.

Federal officials have shrugged off the results, saying the new rules are a work in progress. That's a weak excuse, and one that could do more harm than good. Dithering encourages some critics to imagine that the administration is bent on amnesty and others to conclude that prioritization is a hollow undertaking intended chiefly to placate Latino voters.

The new deportation policy is not a real solution. Only Congress can provide that, by enacting legislation that both secures borders and offers a path to legalization for those already here. But

the policy, if evenly and thoughtfully implemented, could introduce reason and proportion into a system too often lacking in both.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinionla/la-ed-dhs-20111127,0,4277129.story>