

# Legalization

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bers are being trained to help applicants determine their eligibility and assemble the required documentation.

Both the Catholic Family Center's main office in downtown Rochester and a satellite office at 877 North Clinton Avenue will serve as counseling centers for those seeking information about legalization.

"This is not just a case of these poor people who need our help," Zuroski said. "The individuals are largely from Catholic backgrounds... and the whole community will benefit from a successful process."

To apply for legalization, individuals need application forms and documentation to establish their identity and the length of time they have been in the United States. That may sound simple, but in many cases, it is not.

Tracing the paper trails of illegal aliens will be difficult, according to James Haggerty, an attorney for the U.S. Catholic Conference, who

conducted one of last week's legalization workshops. He pointed out that many aliens have tried to conceal their identities by adopting aliases and by destroying any documents that prove who they are. Others have simply lost much of their documentation in moving from place to place.

The legalization process is also expensive. Individuals — both adults and children — are required to apply separately. Except for Cuban/Haitian entrants, the INS will charge each applicant \$185 for a single general application, with a cap of \$420 for a family. Applicants must also pay additional fees for medical exams, photographs and fingerprinting.

"That may be very difficult and expensive for many people," Haggerty pointed out, "but it is prohibitive for seasonal and migrant workers."

The law also allows INS to deny legalization to some applicants who meet the basic requirements, but who fall into any of numerous exclusion categories — ranging from felony convictions to consistent dependence on

cash payments from welfare to survive.

Those who are not eligible for legalization have few options. They can return to their own country or try to go to another country, such as Canada. Or they can go back to living underground in the United States. But that lifestyle will become much more difficult, since the new law prohibits employers from hiring them. They are likewise no longer eligible for welfare or medical benefits.

Regardless of whether applicants prove to be eligible for legalization or not, the law considers the information they provide on their applications to be confidential and prohibits the INS from using the data to deport or prosecute disqualifed aliens, unless these aliens had filed fraudulent applications.

Since May 5, Catholic Family Center has processed fewer than a dozen applications, according to James Delaney, coordinator of the agency's Refugee Resettlement Program.

"I think there are others waiting in the wings to see where it will go," he said. "They are utterly terrified of the INS... I think they want

to see if they can trust the private sector to guide them."

Each Tuesday, from 1 to 5 p.m., Delaney and trained volunteers will offer legalization-information sessions at Catholic Family Center's sixth-floor office at 50 Chestnut Street, Rochester.

The diocesan Spanish Apostolate is organizing and training a network of Spanish-speaking volunteers from the Lewis Street Center, the Legal Aid Society, Genesee Settlement House, the Red Cross and other agencies to offer counseling at the Clinton Avenue site.

In June, counseling and outreach to migrant farmworkers will be available at Rural New York Opportunities, Inc., which has offices in Rochester and in Albion, Orleans County.

In the meantime, the Western New York Immigration Action Coalition is also planning a series of public meetings to provide information about the legalization process. The first such meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 13, at 7 p.m. in Corpus Christi School, 880 East Main Street.

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