

## **Representatives Ask I.N.S. to Add Workers to New York Office**

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### **Body**

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The Immigration and Naturalization Service, unloved and much criticized in its present form, may soon pass into history. But before many of its jobs are transferred to a **new** government agency, immigration officials in **New York** are lobbying for a fresh infusion of staff members and equipment.

Like other immigration agency **offices** around the country, **New York** has been losing substantial numbers of employees to better-paying jobs at the Transportation Security Administration and has been unable to fill vacancies.

In response, members of **New York**'s Congressional delegation are trying to pressure **I.N.S.** headquarters to provide special help to the district, saying its present resources are inadequate to fight terrorism. "The **I.N.S.** is now our first line of defense, and the **New York** district is overworked, understaffed and shell-shocked," said **Representative** Carolyn B. Maloney, an organizer of the effort to augment the **New York office**'s work force.

Besides **Representatives** Maloney and Anthony D. Weiner, who also organized the appeal, seven House members from **New York** sent a letter on Tuesday complaining of staff shortages to the **I.N.S.** commissioner, James W. Ziglar.

Immigration officials in Washington said staffing problems in **New York** were no worse than in other big-city districts and stemmed from an unusually high attrition rate within the entire agency, not a lack of money or a shortage of Congressionally authorized jobs.

"Last year, we had our largest hiring year ever -- we hired 4,000 **new** people," said Joseph Karpinski, the agency's director of Congressional relations and public affairs. "This year, with attrition and the additional positions Congress has given us, we have to hire 10,000 people."

**Adding** to the staffing problems, he **added**, is a competitive law enforcement job market that is draining employees and potential **new** recruits from the immigration service. Nationwide, more than 2,500 of the agency's 31,500 full-time employees have quit since last October, said Sidney Waldstreicher, a project manager who oversees recruitment and hiring for the **I.N.S.**

The attrition rate in **New York** has not exceeded that of other districts in most categories. In some jobs, **New York** has lost a smaller proportion of its employees this year than other big-city districts.

The Miami district, according to Mr. Waldstreicher, has lost 48.6 percent of its detention and deportation officers. Houston has lost 23.4 percent of its border inspectors. San Francisco has lost 13.7 percent of its criminal investigators.

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The **New York** district's staff losses were similar and, in some cases, less than in other districts. It has lost 28.6 percent of its detention and deportation officers, 20 percent of its airport inspection staff and 14 percent of its criminal investigators.

Those districts with large contingents of Border Patrol officers have also seen big losses.

"At our current rate of attrition, we could lose one-quarter of our Border Patrol agents by the end of this year," Mr. Karpinski said.

The **New York** district's plea for more employees coincides with the Senate debate over a **new** Homeland Security Department that would absorb the Border Patrol and other enforcement arms of the immigration agency. The House passed a bill that would create its version of the department last week.

All proposals under discussion would redistribute the enforcement and service functions of the **I.N.S.**, upending an agency that has existed for 111 years and has been recently criticized as dysfunctional and ineffective. It is now the biggest federal law enforcement agency.

To make the **new** department work, pay rates for employees of the merged agencies would have to be synchronized, officials said, and that might ultimately stem the outflow from immigration-related jobs.

The fate of the agency's 33 district directors under a **new** department is also unclear, a factor that may have prompted the **New York** district's independent appeal for extra staffing. Until now, directors like Edward J. McElroy, in **New York**, have operated with a great deal of autonomy.

The points raised in the Congressional letter repeated many of the complaints that Mr. McElroy has made to his superiors -- and that his aides have leaked to the news media -- in the last few months. Mr. McElroy declined to comment on the Congressional effort on his district's behalf. "With regards to our present staffing, that's something the district just does not discuss," said Christian Rodriguez, a spokesman for the district. "It's not shared."

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