

80,000 LEGAL ALIENS SET TO LOSE FOOD AID

Daily News (New York)

August 06, 1997, Wednesday

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Section: News; Pg. 22

Length: 391 words

Byline: By KEVIN McCOY

Body

About 80,000 legal immigrants across New York will lose food stamp benefits in less than three weeks despite a new state budget that restores some of the funding cuts ordered by Washington.

The budget includes nearly \$ 33 million to continue food stamps for about 67,000 immigrants who are disabled, under age 18 or over 60.

But it won't fund benefits for the rest of the estimated 147,000 legal immigrants in New York who now get food stamps. They face a loss of aid Aug. 22, officials said.

Until now, legal immigrants were eligible for food stamps if their income was low enough to qualify for other welfare programs.

An average New York City participant gets \$ 85 a month in food stamps.

Federal welfare reforms approved last summer axed the benefits while giving states the option to step in. Gov. Pataki and legislative leaders, with prodding by Mayor Giuliani, approved the limited pickup in the \$ 68 billion state budget adopted Monday.

Immigration advocates applauded the partial takeover but warned that the state agreement contains restrictions that could let some legal aliens go hungry.

"We're pleased that New York State recognized that some action needed to be taken," said Margie McHugh, director of The New York Immigration Coalition. "We also see some potential stumbling blocks."

For instance, the deal extends benefits for young, elderly and disabled immigrants, provided they have lived in New York since Aug. 22 the day the federal cuts became law.

The deal also lets counties vote against participating, even though Washington and Albany pay most costs. Opting out would cut off food stamps for legal immigrants in those counties.

Legal immigrants also will be required to apply for citizenship within 30 days of applying for food stamps.

While applauding the overall agreement, advocates voiced concern over the citizenship rule.

"In many places, the wait to get an appointment for help in applying for citizenship is well beyond 30 days if there are any services at all," said McHugh.

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Advocates for the needy said they feared the restrictions could force more immigrants into overcrowded **food** programs. "We're going to get more people as a result of cutbacks," said the Rev. Bill Greenlaw, director of the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen at 28th St. and Ninth Ave. in Manhattan.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); CITIZENSHIP (90%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (90%); WELFARE BENEFITS (90%); MUNICIPAL FINANCE (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (90%); **FOOD** STAMPS (90%); **FOOD** ASSISTANCE (89%); **FOOD** CHARITIES (89%); CITIZENSHIP LAW (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); NATURALIZATION (89%); AGREEMENTS (88%); APPROVALS (78%); INCOME ASSISTANCE (78%); **FOOD** BANKS & SOUP KITCHENS (78%); CITY GOVERNMENT (75%); LEGISLATION (74%); DISABLED PERSONS (72%); SENIOR CITIZENS (71%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (68%)

Industry: GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (90%); BUDGETS (90%)

Person: RUDY GIULIANI (58%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, NY, USA (88%); ALBANY, NY, USA (58%); NEW YORK, USA (95%)

Load-Date: August 7, 1997