

CRASH KIN MAY LOSE HOPE FOR GREEN CARD

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Body

As if the death of loved ones weren't enough to bear, the **crash** of American Airlines Flight 587 has left some victims' relatives with huge immigration problems.

Some of the survivors had applied for permanent U.S. resident alien status, but the deaths of their sponsors imperiled some applications.

Without the coveted **green cards**, they are unable to fly to the Dominican Republic to attend their loved ones' funerals and then legally return to the United States.

Now, only an extraordinary government action targeted at the Flight 587 disaster will make their funeral trips possible.

One victim of the immigration Catch-22 is Juan Vasquez, 32, of Woodside, Queens.

Vasquez, who drives a limo for a living, came to America as a tourist in 1995 - and overstayed his visa.

During that time, he started dating a woman he met in a club in Astoria. After an engagement of 18 months, Vasquez and Milagros Garcia married last December. Garcia, 23, boarded Flight 587 Monday to visit her mother in Santo Domingo.

"Juan was eligible to apply for his **green card** based on the marriage, but when that plane went down the petition died with his wife," said Vasquez's lawyer, Kerry Bretz, of Manhattan.

There is protection for some married applicants whose spouse-sponsor dies, but Vasquez isn't covered.

"Under law, if the marriage had been in existence more than two years, he would have been able to file a widower's petition," Bretz said, "but now, short of some sort of amnesty action, he's left high and dry."

As a result, Vasquez doesn't have permission to travel to the Dominican Republic for his wife's funeral and then return to his job in New York or his studies at Queensborough Community College in Bayside.

On the morning of the **crash**, Vasquez was in an English class. "My wife's sister called me on my cell phone and told me, but I couldn't believe her, I thought it was a joke," he said.

Now, Vasquez faces a tough choice.

"I want to take my wife to Santo Domingo," he said. "I want to be with her. I don't have any motivation here. I feel very depressed now. I feel like I might just have to leave everything and go."

Bretz said he is hopeful Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) will assist people like Vasquez, though that remains unclear.

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"We will try to help anyone affected by this tragedy in any way we can, so if these individuals haven't been in contact with us, they should do so," said Bradley Tusk, Schumer's communications director.

Graphic

KRISTEN ARTZ ANGUISH Juan Vasquez lost his wife, Milagros Garcia, (inset) on Flight 587. Now his bid for green card is in jeopardy.

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