

**Illegal Salvadoran Immigrants May Get a Break;**  
**Lower Fees Proposed for Program Shielding Them From Deportation**

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## **Body**

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The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, swamped with complaints, has proposed easing a financial burden for illegal Salvadorans immigrants seeking a temporary reprieve from deportation under a new congressionally mandated program.

INS Commissioner Gene McNary has recommended lowering processing fees for the program, according to immigration rights activists who met with McNary last week. McNary could not be reached for comment.

Known as TPS, or temporary protective status, the program bars authorities from deporting Salvadorans for a period of 18 months, time enough to allow U.S. officials to evaluate human rights conditions in that war-ravaged country. It also gives the immigrant the right to work during that period.

To qualify, an immigrant must apply to the immigration service every six months, paying fees each time. But proponents of a fee change have said the high costs initially proposed by the INS have deterred applications. Currently, a family of five must pay \$ 1,650 during the life of the program, but under the revised schedule the family would pay \$ 765.

So far, 20,000 people have applied, immigration officials said, with Washington receiving the highest number of applicants nationwide, followed by Baltimore.

Daniel A. Katz, executive director of the Central American Refugee Center in Washington, said far more people should have applied. If the fee structure is not changed and the pace continues, the program will fall dramatically short of reaching the estimated 300,000 illegal immigrants nationwide and 50,000 locally who qualify, Katz said.

Those who fail to apply run the risk of being deported.

Both the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Justice must approve any recommendations by McNary, said INS spokesman Duke Austin, who confirmed only that the fee schedule is under review.

But an aide to Rep. Joseph Moakley (D-Mass.), who sponsored the legislation creating temporary protective status, said he knows of no opposition to the proposed fee change. "My understanding is that we should expect the changes shortly," said aide Jim McGovern.

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Austin said such programs always have a "bell curve" with few applicants at the beginning of the program and a surge of applicants near the end. The deadline for applying is at the end of June.

McNary's decision to recommend a fee change was hailed as a victory for a coalition of Salvadoran activists who have been trying for more than a decade to get the administration to recognize them as war refugees.

It also marks an unusual spirit of cooperation between the immigration service and immigration rights groups.

"Our impression is that the immigration service, under Commissioner McNary, is making every effort to implement this program fairly and efficiently," said Frank Sharri, director of the National Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Forum, which has become the nationwide clearinghouse for immigrant rights groups.

McNary's revised proposal places a limit on costs to families larger than three people. The first three applicants would have to pay \$ 135 initially. Then each six months, the paying applicants would be charged an additional \$ 60 to renew their work authorization permits.

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