

Transfer of INS official assailed

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Body

Houston immigration chief Ronald Parra, one of only two Hispanics among 33 district directors in the Immigration and Naturalization Service, is being transferred in a move that has him and local Hispanics crying foul.

Parra, 42, is fighting reassignment to head the St. Paul, Minn., district, which has 100 fewer staff members than the 265-person Houston office.

INS Commissioner Gene McNary says Parra's relationship with regional superiors "had deteriorated." He refused further comment. Parra also declined comment - citing an INS policy established two months ago by McNary prohibiting public statements by INS staff.

"He should be promoted, not transferred," says Leonel Castillo, a former INS commissioner. More than 50 Hispanic business leaders and a group of immigration lawyers have written letters asking McNary to reconsider.

They credit Parra with clearing up backlogs, operating an amnesty program that attracted 50,000 applicants and easing long-standing tensions between the INS and immigration interest groups.

"I've seen tremendous improvement in the organization and the functions of the office ... ," said Judith Cooper of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Parra was criticized earlier this year for appearing at a news conference with a conservative immigration lobbying group. And federal judge James DeAnda chastised him for blaming the courts for an 18-month waiting period for citizenship applicants. But the INS says his transfer is not connected to those incidents.

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