

Lawsuit opens door for immigrants to get citizenship

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As many as 1,000 people who may have been wrongly denied U.S. **citizenship** for minor infractions could eventually be allowed to take the **citizenship** oath, thanks to a **lawsuit** brought by a South Korean man. He was rejected because he once gathered too many oysters along a beach.

U.S. officials conceded that from 1998 to 2004, immigration authorities in Seattle misapplied the "good moral character" standard for naturalization and routinely denied **citizenship** to people because of minor infractions on their record.

Among them was Kichul Lee, who in 1999 was fined \$152 for collecting 51 oysters, almost three dozen more than the state's limit, along a Washington beach. In 2003, he was denied **citizenship** because of it.

"Taking too many oysters off the beach doesn't show you lack good moral character," said Lee's attorney, Robert Gibbs.

Immigration officials admit that Lee and some other **immigrants** were wrongly rejected for offenses as minor as traffic infractions. A judge agreed last month to let such claims for **citizenship** go forward as a class-action **lawsuit**, meaning hundreds of people could join the case. The judge ordered Wednesday that Lee and three others be sworn in, even as the case progresses.

Immigration officials in Seattle have reassigned a supervisor and retrained workers to carry out policies correctly. But U.S. District Judge Robert Lasnik said the case should go forward to establish whether the government has taken adequate steps to solve the problem and make sure it does not happen again.

Kristin Johnson, a government attorney representing the Seattle immigration office, said that Lasnik's ruling was fair and that a class-action suit would be a good way to determine how extensive the mistakes were.

In his ruling, Lasnik said several hundred applicants may have been denied **citizenship** based on incorrect character findings. Gibbs put the figure at 500 to 1,000 and said the problem appears confined to the Seattle office.

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