

RULES SPELL TROUBLE FOR POOR IMMIGRANTS

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Body

WASHINGTON Immigration officials yesterday published new rules that eventually could lead to the first-ever deportations from the U.S. of individuals for being poor.

"We've never deported anybody as a public charge [indigent] before," said John Virtue, executive associate commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

But he said the new rules based on welfare and immigration reforms enacted by Congress and signed by President Clinton will force the INS to move for the deportation of certain categories of immigrants who fail to reimburse the government for public aid they received.

He said the rules, which take effect Dec. 19, will require about 565,000 sponsors of immigrants, including many of those already here, to submit Affidavit of Support forms to show that they have income levels at 125% of the federal poverty line, or \$ 20,062 for a family of four.

The forms must be submitted for all family-based immigrants, and for employment-based immigrants coming to the U.S. to work for family members.

The new rules bar such immigrants from receiving food stamps, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families for five years from their date of entry into the country.

Although the INS believes that "family reunification should not be limited to the wealthy," Virtue said, "if repayment is not made [for any benefits received under those programs], that person may be subject to removal from the U.S."

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