

Deportation delay brings celebration

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Body

Residents of a Bethesda condominium complex who waged a relentless campaign for weeks to prevent the deportation of a beloved building engineer were ecstatic to hear yesterday that Immigration and Customs Enforcement has granted a deferral to Marco Antonio Rua, permitting him to remain in the country.

Residents of the Wisconsin, whose campaign on behalf of Rua was profiled recently in The Washington Post, said they planned to hire Rua back as soon as he received a work permit. Rua's attorney said that ought to happen relatively quickly.

"Here's my statement - yaaayyyyy!!!" said Marcia Weinberg, a board member at the condominium and a resident. "I am also proud of America, because at times like this, you can get very upset and angry, and I knew America was better than the way it was being shown and the way it was showing itself. This gives me a renewed faith in my country and its sense of righteousness and also in its compassion."

Rua, 43, and his 17-year-old daughter, Andrea Rua, a stand-out freshman at Montgomery College, said they were ordered to leave the country in September after a family immigration petition was denied. Because the Ruas had entered the country under what is known as a visa-waiver program, they did not have the right to a court hearing. The only hope, residents of the Wisconsin decided, was for immigration authorities to grant them a deferral.

Rua, who has provided handyman services to the residents of the complex for 15 years, received an outpouring of support once he revealed that he had been ordered to leave. Residents, who include Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), wrote letters and signed petitions asking that the deportations be deferred. Rep Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland) and Sen Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Maryland) obliged residents by writing letters to the Department of Homeland Security, and residents said those efforts probably played an important role in the government's decision to allow Rua and his daughter to remain in the country.

Julia M. Toro, Rua's attorney, said that because Rua's wife, Liliana, had recently been issued a green card, Rua and his daughter would now be able to apply for permanent residency themselves. Had they been forced to leave the country in December, as ICE officials had initially demanded, the chance to reenter the country could have been delayed - possibly by years.

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Although Liliana Rua was also undocumented, an immigration judge in Baltimore recently allowed her to remain in the country to care for two U.S. citizens who depended on her - her mother, who has leukemia, and her 9-year-old son, Renzo, who was born in the United States. Effectively, Toro said, the judge had granted Liliana Rua a green card. A number of residents from the Wisconsin went to Baltimore to show their support at the court hearing.

Marco and Andrea Rua said in interviews that they were overwhelmed by the good news - and greatly relieved.

"Hanukkah comes tomorrow, and, in the Jewish tradition, there was this small band of people called the Maccabees who saw an injustice and decided something needed to be done about it," Weinberg said, drawing an analogy between the religious tale and the campaign that residents of the complex had waged on behalf of the Ruas. "The strength of a group united is pretty amazing."

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