

GREEN CARD DELAYS PUT HEAT ON INS 3-yr. process faulted

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Body

Immigrants' rights advocates charge that current U.S. immigration policy is unfair to those who have to wait up to three years to receive **green cards**.

The **delays** have caused such severe difficulties for applicants that the problem requires the immediate attention of Congress and immigration authorities, the Rev. Brian Jordan, an immigration counselor at St. Francis of Assisi Church **in** Manhattan, said yesterday.

"I feel like the victim of a bad system," said Florencia Carrillo, 30, a store cashier from Brooklyn who applied for her **green card in** March 1996, and has yet to hear from the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Said Jordan: "They played by the rules; why penalize them?"

Jordan said Congress and immigration authorities have aggravated the situation by limiting funds and staff to deal with a backlog of more than a million **green card** applications nationwide.

"My experience is very bad. I can't go to Mexico to see my 13-year-old son, and I haven't seen him since 1995," said Carrillo, who has two other children with her American-citizen husband.

Omar Brown, 23, faces deportation because the **INS delayed processing** his **green card** application, though his mother had petitioned for him seven months before he turned 21.

Worse, his mother, Claudette Salmon, was murdered **in** Jamaica, Queens, **in** 1997, leaving Brown to fight the **INS** position that he had "aged out," and that the petition had died along with his mother.

"I think the system is being unfair," Brown said. "I have no personal anger toward the **INS**; I just want them to look at this case and see what can be done."

But the **INS** already has rejected an attempt by Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Southern Queens) to reopen the case.

"It was disappointing for us, because **in** my office, we always run against a brick wall when dealing with immigration services," Meeks said.

INS officials admitted that the **delays** have caused a lot of inconvenience, and blamed the backlog on an influx of **green card** applicants and background checks that are required by the immigration law of 1996.

The national average for the time between receipt of the application and the completion of the **process** for successful applicants is 33 months, said **INS** spokesman Bill Strassberger.

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"The **INS** rules and regulations are archaic and tend to be, **in** a large sense, prejudiced," Meeks said. "I am working with [Rep.] Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas **in** looking at mechanisms through which we can fix the immigration laws of 1996."

The military service also is feeling the pinch, said Cmdr. Christopher Lagemann, head Navy recruiter **in** the New York district.

Sailors who marry noncitizens abroad now encounter lengthy **delays** before their spouses are granted permanent residency, he said.

"The interesting thing is the first problem was the time it took to get citizenship, and now that they've fixed that it takes too long to get a **green card**," Lagemann said.

Such **delays**, he said, also disqualify potential noncitizen recruits, who must be permanent residents.

One **in** four Navy recruits **in** the New York area is a noncitizen.

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