

ARAB CABBIE SIGNED IN, FEDS MAY TOSS HIM OUT

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Body

This Father's Day, all Sameh Al-Qoudoh has to look forward to is driving his yellow cab for about 17 hours - to come up with \$4,000 for attorneys' fees.

In April, Al-Qoudoh complied with the federal government's special registration program that required Muslim and Arab immigrant men to report to immigration officials. This morning, the Jordanian national is due on the 12th floor of 26 Federal Plaza in lower Manhattan for a deportation hearing.

"That's my life now," said Al-Qoudoh, 32, who lives in Red Hook with his wife and two U.S.-born daughters. "To save money for the lawyers."

Flanked by their American-born sons and daughters and green card-holding wives, several men in similar situations spoke out yesterday at the Arab-American Family Support Center in Brooklyn.

More than 500 of the center's clients came to seek relief from deportation orders born of the government's new - and, they say, too punitive - registration process.

"I try to do the best for my family, but we are the victims now - we pay for everything" as a result of backlash from the World Trade Center terror attacks, said Al-Qoudoh.

More than 13,000 Arab and Muslim men who registered with immigration authorities this year are facing deportation.

Many of them are the breadwinners for their families.

"Wives and mothers are losing their heads of households," said Emira Habiby Browne, the executive director of the 10-year-old support center. "Who is going to protect and care for these women and children?"

The federal government has applauded the men - 82,880 to date - who have shown up for required registration.

But Bill Strassberger, spokesman for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Washington, said the agency cannot ignore those who are in the U.S. illegally.

"Complying with one law does not absolve someone who is in violation of another law," he said. "But everyone . . . will have their chance in court to say why they should be allowed to remain. And having an immediate-relative petition is much stronger grounds than someone who has no petition pending."

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