

More Judges Hired to Help With Backlog in Immigration Cases

Posted: Sep 20, 2016 8:07 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, September 20, 2016 11:07 PM EDT

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UPDATE 9/22/16 - The Executive Office for Immigration Review said they're now authorized to fill 374 judge positions.

The agency said they're considering a pool of 100 judge candidates. They also said they plan to request another 25 positions from Congress.

WESLACO - The number of priority cases in U.S. immigration courts is growing, causing a backlog on other cases that have been filed before them.

Those priority cases include immigration hearings for women with children, unaccompanied children and people who are being detained for the first time.

A report from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse shows the backlog is now over 500,000 cases.

In the last 11 months, the Rio Grande Valley has seen 45,000 families and 33,000 unaccompanied children pass through the region.

Leonel Lopez, a longtime immigration attorney, explained what is causing this increase.

"The Valley's just like a revolving door. You come in, get your papers, get written up, ride the bus and go wherever you're going," he said.

Immigration officers catching and releasing people said they have been told to show up in court at a later date on their own recognizance. Perez said that is changing.

"They want those cases that just came in to be the first ones to handled, to go to court. So they get the first shot," he said.

The immigration attorney said that keeps people out of that catch and release system.

Perez said it's also affecting people in the Valley. He said people who have been residing illegally in the Valley for years, and who have U.S. citizens as spouses or children, will have to wait.

"I want to take that case to the judge, but they're low priority. So even though I may want to go to the judge real quickly, it may be two or three years before I can get to the court," he said.

Perez said the government is sending a message to people who are just getting here.

"What they want to do is send a signal to Central America, 'Don't come anymore because we're going to be very quick in processing you to go back,'" said the attorney.

CHANNEL 5 NEWS contacted the Executive Office for Immigration Review about the backlog, but they have not responded to the request.

A report to Congress shows more judges will be in the pipeline to expedite these cases. Another report by the TRAC Center details only 291 judges handle the caseload of more than 500,000 people.

<http://www.krgv.com/story/33143994/more-judges-hired-to-help-with-backlog-in-immigration-cases>