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Bishops Advocate for Suspension of Immigration Arrests in Hurricane Affected Areas

As part of CLINIC's advocacy efforts on behalf of immigrants affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio (Chair, CLINIC Board) and San Bernadino Bishop Gerald Barnes (Chair, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services) sent a letter to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff requesting that DHS implement a policy of suspending immigration arrests and enforcement based on lack of status during times of disaster and national or state emergency.

In addition, the letter requests that Secretary Chertoff implement a policy that all people, irrespective of immigration status, be eligible for DHS emergency assistance so that people do not avoid needed emergency care, and so that DHS can make an accurate assessment of the numbers of people impacted.

Read the letter to Secretary Chertoff online at
http://cliniclegal.org/Katrina/DiMarzio_Barnes_letter_to_Chertoff_Feb_2006.pdf

CLINIC Issues Press Release Critical of White House Report

On February 27th, CLINIC issued a press release criticizing the White House report: "The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned." CLINIC found that the report, though thorough, completely omitted the impact of Hurricane Katrina on immigrants, particularly those without immigration status, who were living along the Gulf Coast.

In a letter to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, Chair of CLINIC's Board of Directors, and Bishop Gerald Barnes, Chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration and Refugee Services, requested that DHS implement a policy to suspend immigration law enforcement during times of national or state emergencies. The Bishops also requested that DHS ensure that all persons are eligible

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for emergency assistance, irrespective of immigration status, so that no human being is put at peril.

Donald Kerwin, CLINIC's Executive Director, stated that it was unfortunate that the White House report neglected to separate immigration enforcement from disaster relief.

The CLINIC press release is available at http://cliniclegal.org/content_n22406.shtml

Update on USCIS functions in the New Orleans area

The following update pertains to the New Orleans USCIS Office and was provided to Community Based Organizations during a February 28, 2006 meeting with USCIS HQ. USCIS stated that it would be fully restored in New Orleans at the end of May 2006 when its functions would move into new office space in Metairie, LA, a suburb of New Orleans.

USCIS stated that it had been conducting naturalization, adjustment of status and I-751 interviews in the New Orleans area since November in a temporary location lent to them by the City of Kenner, LA. USCIS stated that it had also been conducting interviews since October 2005 in Jackson, MS out of its Application Support Center (ASC) for persons living in Mississippi and northern Louisiana.

USCIS stated that since October 2004, it has been naturalizing people in the Federal Courts in Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Shreveport, and Jackson, MS. On February 3, 2006, USCIS stated that it conducted its first administrative naturalization ceremony in Kenner, LA of 20 persons. USCIS stated that it was continuing to schedule administrative ceremonies every week, until early March, at which time the Federal Court would once again begin holding judicial naturalization ceremonies every month.

USCIS stated that it was trying to be judicious in the scheduling of individuals for interviews, and to make the best use of its scarce resources. For example, USCIS stated that it was not scheduling interviews for persons residing in areas that according to the postal service were not yet receiving mail delivery (i.e. individuals who had to go to the post office to receive their mail), and those whose zip codes on the following website indicate that they are only getting partial service.

<http://www.usps.com/communications/news/serviceupdates.htm?from=bannercommunications&page=serviceupdates>. USCIS stated that it was sending all interview notices out at least 30 days in advance to account for forwarding of mail, and reminded applicants to contact the 1-800 number to provide new addressees (as required by law).

USCIS stated that it could not receive mail at its temporary site in Kenner, LA. USCIS instructed that all correspondence be sent to the USCIS Memphis office where New Orleans files were being housed. USCIS said that at this time, in cases where an applicant had been scheduled for an appointment/interview after the hurricane, it was not issuing

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denials if the applicant failed to appear for the interview/appointment. USCIS stated that after it moved into its permanent location in Metairie, it would begin sending out notices to all persons who had failed to appear for an interview/appointment in order to give them a window of opportunity to state their interest in pursuing their applications. However, USCIS stated that if a notice was returned to its Metairie office as undeliverable as there was no forwarding order/address on file, the applications would be denied at that time.

USCIS stated that all information services and fingerprinting services would continue to be conducted out of Jackson, MI until the Metairie office opened in May. It stated that customers would have to make InfoPass appointments when the Metairie office opened in May, as it would operate on a strict InfoPass only basis.

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