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May 29, 2006, 11:17PM

Framed migrants may get visas

3 victims in 2001 fake-drug scandal in Dallas could be allowed to stay in the country legally

Associated Press

DALLAS - Three of the Mexican immigrants framed in the city's 2001 fake-drug scandal may receive special visas for crime victims that would allow them to remain in the country legally.

In 2003, more than 80 drug cases in Dallas were dismissed after tests showed that supposed drugs were chalk dust and other substances planted on immigrants. Exonerated victims won a \$5 million lawsuit against the city.

Many of the immigrants were in the country illegally, uncertain if they would face deportation.

Erubiel Cruz, 51, Jose Luis Vega, 39, and Jaime Siguenza, 34, may be among the first in the nation to receive special visas for crime victims as early as this summer, government officials said.

Congress created the visa category in 2000, intending to help with the reporting and prosecution of crimes against immigrants.

However, procedures and regulations for the visas were never published.

Cruz, who will testify in the upcoming corruption trial of former narcotics officer Mark De La Paz, and others have temporary permission to live and work in the country, but cannot leave for any reason.

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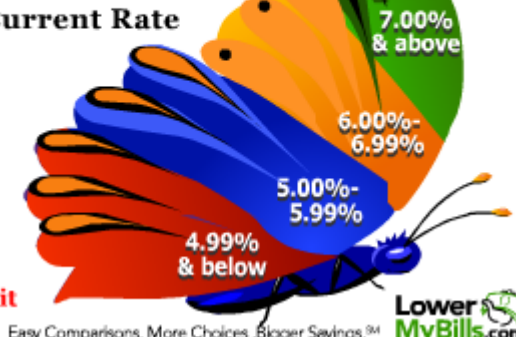
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One victim risked losing custody of his children if he did not return to Mexico. Now the Dallas County District Attorney's Office is working with federal officials to bring him back to testify against De La Paz.

In 2005, more than 1,600 immigrant crime victims applied for the visas. The original legislation provided for as many as 10,000 visas per year.

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