

Chicago Tribune

Originally posted: July 12, 2006

Maldonado's scheme

As a Registered Nurse (and an immigrant) with over 30 years of experience at the bedside and as a director of nursing I cannot begin to tell you how much Maldonado's scheme, as outlined in your article, disturbs me and give me concerns for patient safety and the nursing practice ("Bilingual health workers sought," Metro, July 11).

Maldonado can propose all the plans he wants to "legalize" non-legal workers with work visa, but in the end it is out of the County's hands and he knows it. In nursing for example, there are many steps a foreign-trained nurse (and many of the individuals would in all likelihood have been trained in their home country) would have to take before being granted a visa to work in the US. Just some of these steps are the CFGNS test, Visa screen process, taking all three "English" tests (TOEFL, TWE and TSE), all this before they could even take the NCLEX (a Nursing "state" board/licensure test). Unless of course Mr. Maldonado plans to wave his magic wand and make these steps disappear as well. And finally, most State Board of Registered Nursing have moral turpitude and ethics rules that would in all likelihood bar these nurses from licensure. A nurse who has lied to enter this country or to remain in this country would in all probability fall under this mantel and would be ineligible for licensure. Though this may seem harsh it is a standard that is set high because of the trusted position given to nurses. A nurse that has lied about their immigration status, educational background or even their language competency has an ethics issue and one must ask if they can lie about this – what else are they willing to lie about.

Remember it could be you or your loved one that may end up a patient of one of the nurses that was allowed into nursing by way of Maldonado's scheme.

*Genevieve M. Clavreul, R.N., Ph.D.
Pasadena, Calif.*

Bilingual health workers sought

Visa plan would be open even to those illegally in U.S.

By Oscar Avila, Tribune staff reporter. Tribune staff reporter Stephen Franklin contributed to this report

July 11, 2006

Cook County should sponsor foreign-born nurses, pharmacists and radiologists for legal work visas to help fill a shortage of Spanish-speaking health professionals, a county commissioner said Monday.

Commissioner Roberto Maldonado's proposal is unconventional enough, but he wants to take it even further: He wants the county to hire Illinois college graduates in the health field even if they don't have legal immigration status.

The idea is clearly illegal, immigration experts agree, but Maldonado said he will introduce the plan Wednesday to highlight the shortage of bilingual health providers at county facilities.

"If somebody wants to challenge that in court, they can. I want the county to break ground," he said. "Here we have a great need and a great pool of potential health professionals. Why not match the two?"

Experts estimated that less than 5 percent of the state's nurses are bilingual; county officials estimate that about one-third of their patients speak primarily Spanish.

Under the modest pilot program, the county would work with Latin American consulates in Chicago to fill about 20 professional positions.

Both components of the proposal are likely to generate criticism--from opponents of illegal immigration and from labor unions that contend the legal work visas would displace U.S.-born workers.

The H-1B visa program has become popular among employers, who quickly snapped up the 65,000 visas available for fiscal 2007. Industry groups have pushed to expand the visas, which last for up to six years and are geared to specialized fields, such as engineering and law.

The proposal would focus on students from Latin America at Chicago-area colleges who need work visas to remain in the U.S. The program also would benefit legal immigrants in Chicago with professional training.

Cook County would sign a pact to provide the consulates of at least 10 Latin American nations, including Mexico, Ecuador and Chile, an ongoing list of vacancies at county hospitals and clinics. County officials and the consulates would work together to select applicants.

Jill Furillo, an official with the union that represents nurses at county-operated health facilities, said her group does not oppose employing foreign-born nurses to fill vacancies. But "our position is that we need to do everything we can to solve the nursing shortage by training and educating people from our community here," said Furillo, an official with the National Nurses Organizing Committee.

Aida Giachello, director of the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training and Policy Center agrees that health authorities must do a better job of fostering a new generation of bilingual U.S.-born workers. But with the shortage so severe, health officials cannot close the door to foreign talent, she said.

Some experts question whether the H-1B visas would fill the nursing shortage because immigration authorities typically don't include nursing as a "specialized field" that qualifies for the program.

Maldonado's more radical idea is to hire undocumented immigrants with health training. Maldonado said he would try to link them with legal visas but would hire them anyway if they graduated from public state universities. Because they are living here illegally, those graduates now have no job prospects after attending college under an Illinois law that grants in-state tuition to undocumented high school graduates.

Paul Zulkie, a Chicago immigration attorney, said the county has no authority to override federal immigration law that prohibits hiring illegal immigrants. Federal authorities could fine the county or even bring criminal charges if it knowingly hired illegal immigrants.

"The law is very clear. There is no gray area," said Zulkie, past president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Maldonado acknowledged that the proposal would generate heated debate. He plans to join consular representatives at a downtown news conference Tuesday to promote the idea.

Cesar Romero, spokesman for the Mexican Consulate, said hundreds of immigrants swamped an event several years ago to publicize jobs in health care. Most were ineligible to fill the jobs because they were living here illegally, he said.

Mexican officials offered qualified support for Maldonado's plan to hire illegal immigrants.

"We support any kind of measure that can benefit the immigrant community," Romero said.

- - -

oavila@tribune.com

Copyright © 2006, [Chicago Tribune](#)