

Cubans to get free work permits in deal

An agreement between a Miami immigrant rights group and federal authorities will deliver free work permits to hundreds of Cuban migrants.

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Federal immigration officials will issue free work permits for as many as 1,000 Cubans who were unable to obtain them because of a computer glitch, the nonprofit Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center plans to announce today.

The settlement is the result of a lawsuit the immigrant rights group filed, with pro bono assistance from Holland & Knight, against U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in federal court in Miami.

An agency spokesman in Washington said he had no details on the matter but did not dispute that a settlement had been reached.

The class-action suit was filed July 24 on behalf of Cubans who applied for work permits but did not receive them in a "timely manner." According to court papers, a "computer glitch" at the agency failed to process applications from immigrants whose case numbers began with the digits 200. The Cuban migrants' numbers were in that category.

As a result, qualifying Cubans can now apply for a free work permit valid for one year, said Cheryl Little, executive director of the advocacy center.

The usual filing fee of \$180 per permit, formally known as the Employment Authorization Document, will be waived.

"We are extremely grateful that CIS has agreed to settle this case and are not only quickly providing work permits to class members, but also waiving their \$180 work permit filing fee," said Little in a written statement.

"Individuals who think they might qualify under the settlement should ask for assistance from the nonprofit agency that helped them file for a work permit," Little added. "Applications for a free work permit under the terms of the settlement must be filed locally in Miami under special filing rules."

To file under the special rules of this settlement, an applicant must have been born in Cuba, been paroled, have a so-called alien number starting with 200, and filed an I-765 application for a work permit based on the parole between Aug. 1, 2005, and July 24, 2006 -- and not received the permit.