

Applications for Visas Expedited For Cuban Refugees Already Here

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 19—Cuban refugees in this country seeking permanent visas will have their applications expedited under new Justice Department guidelines.

They will no longer have to compete with other applicants from the Western Hemisphere for the 120,000 such visas annually available under the immigration quota system. Instead, visas will be immediately available to Cubans who have already applied, although there may be some delay because of the number of applications, according to the department's Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The ruling last Thursday affects some 66,000 Cuban refugees who have applied for visas but have had to wait, in most cases for more than two years, until they became available under the quota system, according to the immigration service.

It will also make more visas available sooner for prospective immigrants from Canada, other Latin American countries and the Caribbean, the agency said, since their ranks will no longer be swelled by Cuban refugees seeking permanent resident status.

The ruling also makes the permanent residence status of the refugees retroactive from the time they were paroled in this country—that is, admitted but with no legal status, the agency said.

Earlier Start for Waiting

Under the old system, Cuban refugees had to wait five years from the time they received a permanent visa before applying for United States citizenship. Now the five-year wait begins from the time they were paroled. According to a service spokesman, a number of refugees are eligible for citizenship upon obtaining a visa because in some cases they have waited for five years to get one.

According to the service, some 700,000 refugees have come to the United States since 1959, 213,000 of whom are now permanent residents. About 50 percent of the refugees live in the Miami area, according to the agency's statistics, with another 30 percent in the New York-New Jersey area.

The service's Miami office reported that of the 85,000 Miami-based refugees now eligible for visas, only 32,000 have applied. Figures were not immediately available for other areas.