

6 Kids Face Deportation — Town Steps In

By Jack Viets
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More than 1,000 residents of the San Joaquin Valley town of Patterson asked the U.S. Immigration Service yesterday to allow six Mexican children facing deportation to remain with their parents.

Because the children came to the United States to live with their farm-worker parents after the new immigration law became effective Nov. 6, 1986, they do not qualify for amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act. Even though their mothers and fathers are now temporary legal residents of the United States under the amnesty program, the children are caught up in the deportation process.

The six children from the two families symbolize the plight of an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Mexican children who will be forced to leave their families in the United States and return to Mexico unless remedial legislation is passed, said their attorney, Rhoda Wilkinson Domingo.

The 1,000 signatures in support of the children were the result of a petition drive in the Tulare County farm town, which has a population of fewer than 8,000. The drive produced moving personal letters and long lists of names of local residents who felt the children should be allowed to stay.

Domingo presented the petitions and packets of letters to David L. Ilchert, director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service for the San Francisco district. Ilchert could not be reached for comment on the case.

Unless the law is fixed, Domingo said, the parents of these children will be forced to make an agonizing choice of staying in the United States without their children to work as legal resident aliens or sending the children back to Mexico.

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The cases of the six children are complicated by the way in which their parents brought them into the United States.

Eduardo Morales, 6, and his brother, Noberto, 3, the sons of Eduardo Morales, a Patterson farm worker, have been living in Patterson since March 1989, when their father picked them up at the border after paying another child to escort them across.

They were caught by the INS, which confiscated the father's car and began deportation proceedings against the children.

Their four cousins, Leticia, 12, Gloria, 11, Cristina, 6, and Salvador, 5, children of Eduardo's brother, Salvador Morales, also a Patterson farm worker, crossed the border the same way in April 1989. They were also caught by the INS and face deportation.

A continuance of the deportation proceedings against the four cousins expires today, and a six-month postponement of a deportation order granted by an INS judge to Eduardo and Noberto Morales expires May 20.

Salvador Morales has been working in the United States as a seasonal farm worker since 1978, and his brother, Eduardo, since 1980, and both their wives have been working here since 1985, Domingo said.