

Patterson children win delay in deportation case

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Four Mexican children who face deportation and possible separation from their families in Patterson will be allowed to remain in the United States for another three months, a federal judge ruled Thursday in San Francisco.

But the Immigration and Naturalization Service may appeal that decision, the children's San Francisco attorney, Rhoda Wilkinson Domingo, said.

Domingo said U.S. Immigration Judge Dana Marks-Keener granted a continuance that means the children of farmworkers Salvador and Blandina Morales

can stay legally in the United States until Sept. 27, at which time Domingo intends to ask for another reprieve.

The children's plight has become a cause celebre for an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Mexican children who might be forced to return to Mexico unless immigration laws are changed, Domingo said.

The problem revolves around limitations in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, legislation that set up a citizenship process for farmworkers who entered the United States illegally before 1982. The law did not make provision for family members who may have

been left behind in Mexico or other countries after 1986.

In the case of Salvador and Blandina Morales, their four children — Leticia, 12, Gloria, 11, Christina, 6, and Salvador, 5 — entered the United States in 1989, too late to qualify, the INS said.

So while Salvador, 32, and Blandina, 34, are now on their way to becoming U.S. citizens, their children are not.

The INS caught the children at the border and instituted deportation proceedings against them last year. The agency has been trying to deport the children ever since.

The Morales children are not the only Patterson residents facing deportation. In May, their cousins, Eduardo, 6, and Norberto, 3, were granted a continuance allowing them to stay in the United States until October.

Both sets of parents say there is no one in Mexico to care for their children. And the parents fear they will risk their own citizenship if, before it is final, they return to Mexico with their children. The parents now are classified as temporary citizens, one step beyond the illegal-alien

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status they had before the amnesty law passed.

While deportation proceedings are on hold, Congress is considering legislation to help children like the Moraleses. Rep. Bruce Morrison, D-Conn., has introduced legislation that would extend citizenship to immediate relatives of immigrants who are granted amnesty, provided the relatives arrived in the United States before Jan. 1, 1990.

But the legislation might not pass soon enough to help the Morales children. Rep. Barbara

Boxer, D-San Francisco, might introduce a bill on behalf of the two families to grant the children citizenship, Domingo said Thursday.

Sen. Pete Wilson also has inquired about the case, Domingo said.

Domingo said she sent a package to President Bush three weeks ago, giving him information about the Morales case. She included petitions, signed by more than 1,000 people, in support of the children. Also included were 30 letters of support from friends, neighbors, teachers and strangers.