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Immigrants Seeking Citizenship Face Unlawful Delays; NYLAG Files Class Action to Compel Decisions on Naturalization Applications

New York, New York – March 7, 2008 - The New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) filed a class-action complaint, *Milanes v. Chertoff*, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York yesterday on behalf of a class of immigrants challenging unlawful delays in the processing and adjudication of their naturalization applications by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Federal law requires USCIS to adjudicate naturalization applications within a reasonable time. USCIS's failure to do so has resulted in thousands of immigrants waiting well over six months, and in some cases years, since the submission of their applications, with no decision and no word from USCIS.

With the 2008 presidential election less than nine months away, these delays take on particular significance, as thousands of applicants, many of them Latino, could wrongfully be denied the ability to vote and participate in determining the future of their country.

Plaintiffs, all lawful residents in the United States for the past five to twenty-five years, have submitted complete applications for naturalization that have not been adjudicated within a reasonable time. Some have been waiting more than three years for a decision, despite repeated requests for adjudication. All have suffered egregious harm as a result of the delay. For example, Omar Farfan, a decorated veteran of the United States Navy who applied for citizenship over three years ago, cannot get a United States Government job because he is not a citizen. Manuel Martinez, who applied for citizenship over two years ago, is unable to apply for a visa for his elderly mother to leave Mexico and join him in the United States.

Michael Sant'Ambrogio, one of the NYLAG attorneys on the case, said, "The government has been sitting on our clients' applications for years. We have no choice but to seek relief from the Court."

The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) is co-counsel with NYLAG on the case. PRLDEF, established in 1972, has won landmark civil rights cases in education, housing, voting, migrant, immigrant, employment and other civil rights. PRLDEF has fought for the right of non-English speaking students to get a good education, against housing discrimination in city-owned apartments, and to open up employment opportunities for all people.

About NYLAG:

Founded in 1990, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a not-for-profit law office that provides free civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers. A full service agency, NYLAG provides consultation, representation and advocacy. Last year, NYLAG handled 22,370 cases and impacted additional thousands through successful impact litigation and community legal education. For more information on NYLAG, please visit www.nylag.org.

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