



Statement of Todd Gallinger, CAIR-SFBA Legal Counsel

Thursday, February 8, 2007

America is a center of diversity. People from all over the world come here in search of opportunities and freedom. Our country was founded by immigrants and they have continued to contribute to America throughout its history. Coming here, they benefit not only themselves, but also better our country by contributing key aspects of their ethnicities, religions, and cultures. This is the essence of the “American Dream.”

Increasingly, however, many are being denied the opportunity to realize this dream, due to extreme delays in the naturalization process. The reasons for these delays are ambiguous at best. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has received an alarming number of citizenship delay cases from American Muslims nationwide. CAIR’s Bay Area chapter alone has received 65 such cases, mostly from people of Middle Eastern or South-Asian origin. All of them are experiencing similar scenarios of having to wait exceeding the 120 day legal limit after passing their interview. Based on these and reports from other community organizations, we know that these delays have disproportionately affected the American Muslim community.

Regardless of whether the delay is due to discrimination or incompetence, it is illegal and must be corrected immediately. The plight of these lawful residents, all law-abiding and tax-paying members of our society, must be addressed by the legal system. This is particularly important in reaching out to the American Muslim community, which has been unfairly targeted since 9/11. We must show them that fear and xenophobia are not the defining factors in our great country’s legal and political systems.

Today we file this lawsuit with our partners, confident that the legal system will demonstrate to all good and qualified people that they are welcome in America. We must demonstrate to all immigrants, regardless of religion or national origin, that their rights are protected here. Today we file this lawsuit in an attempt to preserve the “American Dream.”

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