

US nursing law assailed

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Groups say it is anti-Filipino
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WASHINGTON, D.C. (AE) — The elation over the passage last year of the Nursing Relief Act granting permanent residency status to Filipino nurses is fast dissipating.

The law has turned out to be more of a bane than a boon to the some 30,000 Filipino nurses

whose future here has remained in limbo for the past several years. It will benefit only a handful of nurses who could meet the tough rules issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

The law is deceptively titled the Nursing Relief Act, but it will provide no relief to the tens of thousands of Filipino nurses who came here to fill an acute shortage all over the United States.

The INS, among other things, has decreed that only those who did not violate the law by working illegally in the US, worked here for at least

three years and passed the licensure examinations are eligible to apply for a change of status.

Reuben Seguritan, a Filipino-American immigration lawyer in New York, said the new law is anti-Filipino because it is aimed directly at Filipino nurses who make up the majority of foreign nurses who came here to fill the nursing need.

He said it will effectively disqualify many of the nurses already working here and will make it doubly harder for others to come here in the future.

Seguritan said that at one time or another, most of the nurses answered the humanitarian call for assistance from other hospitals in need of the nurses' services without informing the INS as provided for in their working visas. All of them are now disqualified from benefiting from the law.

Lawrence Weinig, a senior INS official in New York, has warned

Filipino nurses against lying about their illegal work in their application for permanent residency. He said those caught lying would be subject to immediate deportation.

Seguritan warned that this would only encourage disqualified nurses to turn into TNTs (tago ng tago) and continue to work illegally. As for the nurses intending to come here in the future, he said, the law provides a more cumbersome procedure, which includes getting a certification from the Department of Labor that there is a shortage of nurses or that there is no applicant for the post as advertised.

Seguritan deplored that instead of being rewarded for having performed a humanitarian service by filling the need of hospitals in the US, the Filipino nurses are being threatened with punishment.

He called on the Filipino community to join hands with the nurses

to urge Congress to change certain provisions of the Nursing Relief Act. "The numerous clauses adopted by Congress appear to be directed only at Filipino nurses, and to stifle the future entry of foreign nurses by luring the local labor force into the industry with its new offer of more attractive package benefits," Seguritan said.

Tess Abad of the Filipino Nurses Organization (FNO) in New York summed up the feelings of her group by saying: "If agricultural workers get to enjoy immigration benefits after a few days working in

the fields, why can't we who have worked and served here for years?"

Strangely enough, the Philippine Nurses Association, also in New York, which lobbied for the passage of the law and hailed it as a boon to Filipino nurses, has remained tightlipped about the issue.

"The conditions set (by the INS) will affect numerous nurses who now foresee dark prospects of either having to go back home or taking the unfavorable alternative of going underground," Seguritan said.