

SUNDAY

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

2003
NEWSPAPER
OF THE YEAR
New England
Press Association

www.metrowestdailynews.com

A RULING THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME

Clients of Framingham lawyer celebrate ruling that helps their green card status

By **Liz Mineo**
NEWS STAFF WRITER

Thirteen people hoping to benefit from a landmark ruling that says certain immigrants do not have to leave the United States to obtain green cards gathered at the office of the Framingham attorney who pursued the case.

They gathered to celebrate the case's outcome and to share their stories of how they got caught up in the maze of contradictory federal regulations that prevent them from adjusting their legal status and have a normal life.

"Before this decision, people would have been automatically deported," said John Lalikos, husband of Aneta, an Albanian native, who came here seeking asylum in 2002. "Now, we have the opportunity that

GREEN CARDS, Page A5



STAFF PHOTO BY ALLAN JUNG

Aneta and John Lalikos gather with fellow clients of Framingham lawyer Saher Macarius. The attorney helped win a landmark ruling that says certain immigrants don't have to leave the country to get green cards.

Attorney's win hailed by region's immigrants

GREEN CARDS, From A1

judges can look into our cases individually. ... Now we have hope instead of fear."

The ruling, out of the federal appeals court based in Boston, overturns a government regulation that prevented people allowed into the country on humanitarian grounds from obtaining green cards, even if they are married to U.S. citizens.

The court found the regulation contradicted legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress, which intended that certain immigrants could apply for green cards. A green card allows immigrants to live and work in this country legally.

Framingham lawyer Saber Macarius, who won the case, represented a Lebanese native who sought asylum and has been allowed to stay in the country to get his green card. Without that ruling, Macarius' client would have been deported, separated from his U.S.-born wife and barring him from re-entering the country for 10 years.

Patricia and husband, Roukoz Joumaa, share the same hopes as the Lalikos. They married in 2002, while Joumaa's application for asylum was pending, and since then life has been hard.

"We've been in limbo," said Patricia Joumaa. "Our lives have been on hold because of the courts. We can't buy a house, we can't have children, we can't do anything because we don't know if he's going to be taken away."

That is the worst nightmare for all those gathered at Macarius' office, and it became true for Lisa Habchi-Tierney, whose husband was deported last June, six months after they married.

"We're talking about good, decent people who never committed any crimes," she said. "They're no danger to society, and we treat them like criminals."

Habchi-Tierney's husband came here from Lebanon seeking asylum and since he was sent back to his homeland, his life has been at risk.

For Audrey Botros, senior attorney at Macarius' law firm, the fact that Habchi-Tierney was deported is an unfortunate episode and part of a sentiment against Middle Eastern immigrants, which has grown after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. "Many people have been targeted because they're Middle Eastern," said Botros. "We had a client whose first name was Osama who was targeted by immigration officials."

Like Habchi, many of the men gathered at Macarius' office came from Lebanon fleeing persecution due to their Christian background. They all were allowed into the country, and they all married American citizens while their asylum application was pending. They all want to put down roots here, but have grown frustrated at the bureaucratic red tape.

They said they're baffled at the law that seems to punish those who were allowed into the country for humanitarian reasons rather than those who are living here illegally or committing crimes.

On hand at Macarius' office also were couples Amal and Chamel Makhoul; Rabih and Margo Lichaa; Jessica and Dani Bekachy, and Dani and Alice Joumaa.

They all hope that the new ruling allows them to start new lives without worry or uncertainty.

"We've been walking on egg shells," said Jessica Berkachy. "I wake up and think, is this the day my husband is going to be taken away?"

(Liz Mineo can be reached at 508-6263825 or lmineo@cnc.com.)