

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Honorable
Bob Graham and the Honorable
Connie Mack, U.S. Senate

February 1989

POLITICAL ASYLUM APPLICANTS

Financial Effect on Local Services in the Miami Area



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General Government Division

B-234489

February 23, 1989

The Honorable Bob Graham
United States Senate
The Honorable Connie Mack
United States Senate

In response to your joint request, we met individually with Miami area officials¹ on February 1, 1989, to discuss how the influx of Nicaraguans entering the country at Brownsville, Texas, has affected local service providers in Miami. The Miami officials expressed concern about (1) the financial strain on their public and private organizations providing services to the aliens (e.g., education for children and health needs) and (2) the aliens' general welfare.

After briefing your offices on the result of the meetings with Miami officials, you asked us to provide you with a written summary of the information provided to us. The information Miami officials provided was (1) derived from the data they had at the time of the meetings and (2) not verified by us. The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce set the agenda and invited the participants. Representatives from your Miami offices were present.²

BACKGROUND

United States law allows aliens legally or illegally in this country to apply for asylum. To be granted asylum, an alien is required to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in his or her home country (or country of habitual residence for those persons having no nationality) because of race,

¹Offices represented were: Dade County Public Schools, Office of Metro-Dade County Manager, Florida Health and Rehabilitation Services, City of Miami, United Way, Miami-Dade Community College, and Immigration and Naturalization Service Miami District Office.

²We met with the Immigration and Naturalization Service Miami District Director separately.

religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the authority for any alien present in the United States, or at a land border or port-of-entry, to apply for asylum irrespective of the alien's immigration status. The act authorizes the Attorney General at his discretion to grant asylum to an alien who meets the definition of a refugee and requires that the Attorney General establish a uniform procedure for determining the eligibility of an alien for asylum. The Attorney General has delegated his authority to grant asylum to the 33 district directors of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the immigration judges in the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review.

According to an INS official, the 10 INS district offices with the largest volume of asylum applications received 56,067 applications in fiscal year 1988. The INS Los Angeles District Office received the most applications (28,491), and the INS Miami District Office was second with 8,214 applications. INS estimates that these 10 districts will receive 76,857 applications in fiscal year 1989, or a 37 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. Fiscal year 1989 estimates show that the Los Angeles District will remain first with 33,857 applications and that the Miami District will remain second with 15,021 applications. The estimate for the Miami District shows an 83 percent increase to 15,021.

According to INS statistics, of the 6,270 aliens applying for asylum in INS' Harlingen District in Texas between January 9 and 27, 1989, 38 percent were from Nicaragua and 29 percent were from El Salvador. Miami was the most frequent destination given (31 percent) and Los Angeles the second (19 percent). Of the 1,947 applicants going to Miami, about three-fourths (1,440) were Nicaraguans. The remainder were Hondurans (237), Guatemalans (121), and El Salvadoreans (75). The country of origin for 68 aliens was unknown and 6 came from 5 other countries.

INFORMATION DADE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFICIALS
PROVIDED

Dade County has the largest school enrollment in Florida--an estimated 323,380 students for the 1988 to 1989 school year--and the largest estimated increase in enrollment (67,008) from 1980 to 1990. Both its current enrollment and estimated increase is about twice that (1) of the second largest school district and (2) of the district with the next largest estimated increase. The district is beginning a massive

construction and renovation program to accommodate student growth. Forty-nine schools are scheduled for construction in the next 5 to 7 years. Although voters passed a \$980 million bond referendum in March 1988, the construction plans did not consider the substantial increase in Nicaraguans. The District has now tapped all available state and local funding sources for its capital construction program and must now address the influx of aliens. According to the district, its present student space is already 20 percent less than what is needed for just its current enrollment. To handle the overcrowding, class size has been increased, space is being rented, and rooms not intended to be used as classrooms are being used as such.

According to officials from Dade County Public Schools, a critical problem is a lack of classroom space, but the district has operating expenses of \$5.8 million for school years 1987 to 1988 and 1988 to 1989 that were not reimbursed by the state. They added that illiteracy levels among the new aliens place even more demands on the district school system.

INFORMATION THE OFFICE OF
THE METRO-DADE COUNTY MANAGER
PROVIDED

In calendar year 1988, Nicaraguans received an estimated \$4 million in social services in addition to those provided by the school system. At Jackson Memorial Hospital, an estimated \$3,350,000 was spent to provide health services to Nicaraguan patients classified as indigent or temporarily indigent. The Community Action Agency provided about \$480,000 in social services to Nicaraguans for education, health, and nutrition programs. In addition, the Department of Human Resources spent \$50,000 for such things as neighborhood emergency services and child and elderly services for about 2,000 Nicaraguans.

INFORMATION CITY OF MIAMI
OFFICIALS PROVIDED

On December 14, 1988, the City of Miami offered an emergency shelter at the Bobby Maduro Stadium for the homeless, who included Nicaraguan refugees. The City provided dormitory/sleeping arrangements, meals, job placement, and transportation assistance. City staff have also coordinated volunteer case management services and mental health and primary health services through local agencies. A total of 808 people received services: 433 Nicaraguans and 375 other homeless individuals.

The City estimated the cost of these services since December 14, 1988, to be about \$4,000 a day. Most of the daily cost (\$3,336) was for personnel and labor (e.g., police, and parks and recreation staff). The remaining daily cost (\$683) was for such things as cars, supplies, and property maintenance. Costs are also being incurred for Nicaraguans sheltered at another facility (Pastoral Activity Center).

The Miami City officials said that the Nicaraguans were not causing a crime problem and expressed concern about their plight and the need to find a permanent solution to their problem. The officials believed that if INS denies the aliens' asylum requests, they would try to remain there illegally.

INFORMATION UNITED WAY
OFFICIALS PROVIDED

Officials from the United Way of Dade County discussed activities being provided to the Nicaraguans by the private sector. While data was not available from all the member organizations, United Way officials said that one of the United Way agencies provided assistance to 584 Nicaraguans at a cost of \$24,744 during the 6 months ending December 31, 1988.

INFORMATION MIAMI-DADE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OFFICIALS PROVIDED

During the 1987 to 1988 school term, Miami-Dade Community College provided education to 1,890 Nicaraguans³ at a cost of \$2,713,000, which the college bore. The college expects the number of Nicaraguan students to increase by 40 percent to 2,646 in 1989 to 1990.

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As arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this fact sheet earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the date of issuance. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request. If there are any

³Data did not indicate when these students entered the country.

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questions concerning the contents of this fact sheet, please
call me at (202) 275-8389.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arnold P. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "J".

Arnold P. Jones
Director, Administration of
Justice Issues

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