

# NEW YORK POST

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## Welfare chief pushes foster-kid green cards

By DOUGLAS MONTERO

Foster-care agencies across the state must better identify illegal-immigrant children in their custody to prevent them from "aging out" before getting green cards, according to a new edict from the state's child-welfare czar.

State Office of Children and Family Commissioner Gladys Carrion issued the directive after The Post began questioning why city foster kids eligible for green cards were being sent out of the system as adult illegal immigrants.

The lapse adds to the burden

of the postfoster-care life for many of the young adults, who are unable to get jobs, apply for college financial aid or receive public-housing assistance — contributing to the growing homeless population, advocates say.

Children in foster care are eligible for green cards under the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) law enacted by Congress in 1990. But the law does not apply to the kids once they hit 21.

Advocates say they have for years complained that the city's Administration for Children's

Services has dropped the bureaucratic ball.

"There is a mechanism in place to deal with this, but [children] are falling through the cracks," said Chester Jackson, co-founder of Brooklyn-based You Gotta Believe!, which helps find homes for older foster kids.

Some advocates defended ACS, saying the agency, responsible for about 16,000 kids, informs its more than 30 contract foster-care agencies about the SIJS program.

But ACS "has a lot of difficulty with their policies trickling down," said Dale Margolin, interim director of the Child Ad-

vocacy Clinic at St. John's University's School of Law.

Margolin, a former Legal Aid attorney, said that of the 100 cases involving illegal immigrant kids she saw between 2004 and 2006, nearly one-fifth of them needed SIJS applications.

There are between 100 and 150 foster children currently enrolled in the SIJS program, said Mark Lewis, ACS's Immigration Service director. He insisted that ACS caseworkers already inquire about legal status.

"Our intent is to make sure they all have those documents," he said.

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