

Gonzalez family given one more Independence Day

BYLINE: By DAVID A. LIEB, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.

BODY:

The Gonzalez family, which has been fighting deportation to Costa Rica after overstaying a visitor visa for 13 years, has gotten permission to remain in the United States for one final Independence Day.

Marvin and Marina Gonzalez and their 19-year-old daughter, Marie, had been ordered by a federal immigration appeals board to leave by June 5. But the family said Friday that they had received a 30-day extension, allowing them to stay until July 5.

"One more Independence Day," said Marvin Gonzalez, noting the family had begun packing and was putting its house on the market Monday.

"How ironic is that?" added Marie Gonzalez, who has been leading the family's campaign to try to persuade politicians and government bureaucrats to intercede on its behalf.

The Gonzalezes said they will use the extra time not only to prepare for their departure, but to continue their media pleas to stay. With them Friday was a representative of the Center for Community Change in Washington, D.C., which plans to showcase the Gonzalezes at events in the nation's capital and elsewhere.

"Hopefully, a miracle will happen on their behalf," said Maricela Donahue, a field organizer for the group.

The Gonzalezes arrived in Los Angeles on a six-month visitor visa in November 1991 and later moved to Jefferson City intent on making it their permanent home. They said they mistakenly got the impression they could apply for residency if they just stayed in the United States long enough. But that option was repealed by a 1997 federal law.

Missouri Sens. Kit Bond and Jim Talent and Rep. Ike Skelton all have said they will not file special legislation to grant the Gonzalez family an exception to immigration laws. Such bills are rare and not likely to pass anyway, they said.

The family's illegal status gained attention while Marvin Gonzalez was working as a courier for Gov. Bob Holden in 2002. Holden fired Gonzalez after learning of his status, and federal authorities began deportation proceedings shortly after the firing made the news.

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