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NEWS RELEASE

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New Legal Orientation Program Underway To Aid Detained Aliens

Legal Orientations Benefit Individuals, Reduce Detention Time

FALLS CHURCH, Virginia -- The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) today announced a new Legal Orientation Program which provides information about the immigration legal process to detained aliens facing removal hearings in Immigration Courts. Under this program, private nonprofit agencies give individuals detained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (which recently absorbed the functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service) essential information about court procedures and available options for legal relief prior to their first immigration hearing. By providing early and accurate information to detained aliens, referring them to *pro bono* attorneys, and giving them self-help legal materials, the new Legal Orientation Program will improve the efficiency of immigration proceedings.

Three of six sites selected for the new program are now operational at DHS detention facilities in Port Isabel, Texas; Eloy, Arizona; and Buffalo (Batavia), New York. Two additional sites at Lancaster, California, and Seattle, Washington, are expected to be operational within two months. A sixth site will be selected soon.

More than 23,000 DHS detainees are expected to benefit from the program in the first year. This number represents nearly 20 percent of all detained aliens who appear before Immigration Courts each year.

“Everyone will benefit from this innovative program,” EOIR Director Kevin Rooney said. “The detained individual benefits from better information about his legal situation, and the taxpayer gains with reduced detention costs through a more efficient legal process.”

EOIR evaluated the benefits of such programs in 1998 through three EOIR-funded 90-day pilot projects at detention sites in Port Isabel; Florence, Arizona; and San Pedro, California. Based on a model developed in the early 1990s in Florence, the pilot projects resulted in a nearly 20 percent reduction in detention time while increasing the percentage of detainees able to obtain legal representation.

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Funded through a \$1 million congressional appropriation in FY 2002, the program is being handled under a contract with Norwich University of Northfield, Vermont. As the prime contractor, Norwich will oversee six separate non-profit agencies which will conduct the programs locally. The program will be evaluated closely at each site to determine whether to expand to additional sites in the future.

EOIR, a component of the Department of Justice, is responsible for providing due process to individuals who are charged with immigration law violations. The agency includes the Immigration Courts, the Board of Immigration Appeals which hears appeals from Immigration Court and DHS District Director decisions, and the Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer which handles employment-related immigration matters.

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