

AUGUST 2, 2005 SCHAKOWSKY CALLS FOR CAREFUL STUDY OF VIDEOCONFERENCING IN REMOVAL HEARINGS

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Chief Deputy Democratic Whip, today released a statement calling for a careful review of videoconferencing in immigration removal hearings. Schakowsky's announcement came as the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice and the Legal Assistance Foundation released a study showing that immigrants who do not actually appear in the courtroom and instead testify before a camera from a remote location face more barriers to making their case. Immigrants who testify via videoconference often have little chance to speak or ask questions, face interpretation barriers, and experience technical difficulties with the videoconferencing equipment.

Representative Schakowsky's statement is below:

"Immigration courts have recently been strained by an increased workload, decreased funding, and systematic pressure to resolve cases in a shorter time period. While these are serious challenges facing the immigration system, due process rights for immigrants must not be sacrificed in an attempt to expedite the increased number of cases moving through the system."

"The United States is a country of immigrants, but recent immigrants remain a vulnerable minority in our nation. Since the consequences of removal from the United States are so severe for immigrants and their families, special care must be taken to ensure that they are afforded the same rights and procedures as if they were in court. If videoconferencing is used, measures must be implemented to ensure that those rights are guaranteed."

"The study released today raises serious questions about whether videoconferencing is an adequate substitute for in-person hearings. According to the study, immigrants face problems with their interpreters, experience technical difficulties with the teleconferencing equipment, and are limited in their ability to speak or ask questions."

"The concerns this study raises about teleconferencing deserve careful consideration. To give immigrants a fair hearing, immigration courts should ensure that due process rights and adequate protections are maintained for each immigrant who comes before

the court. No immigrant should be deported and separated from their family because of a technological glitch or a miscommunication prompted by their distance from the court room. Due process is a fundamental right in the United States, and all immigrants should be able to expect equal treatment and a fair hearing when they appear before the court. I want to thank the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice and the Legal Assistance Foundation for their work on this critical issue. I will continue to urge the Bush Administration to review your study and to reconsider what appears to be a flawed process for removal proceedings."