



## **Puerto Rico Action on Birth Certificates Causing More Confusion and Trouble for Mainland Residents**

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The plan by the Puerto Rican government to invalidate all birth certificates on July 1, 2010 is already causing harm to Puerto Ricans and creating confusion among mainland government officials. LatinoJustice PRLDEF has once again written to the Puerto Rican government to delay a new law that will soon require all persons born on the island to get new birth certificates.

LatinoJustice PRLDEF has already received several communications documenting unfair treatment Puerto Ricans have encountered because of this new law. One woman born in Puerto Rico now living in Iowa reported that she was ordered to interview with a "private investigator" after she applied for a new driver's license.

Though the law does not go into effect until July 1, California, Ohio and Nevada have already stated they would not accept any birth certificates from Puerto Rico as proof of birth for driver's licenses. This could effectively leave thousands of Puerto Ricans born on the island with no way of getting driver's licenses in those states.

Cesar Perales, President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF has written to the governor of Iowa to inform him that Iowa's Department of Transportation is wrong in viewing Puerto Rico's new law as invalidating birth certificates from Puerto Rico at this time and that birth certificates from Puerto Rico should still be treated as valid forms of identification by all the agencies of his state.

But ultimately, it is the responsibility of the government of Puerto Rico to protect Puerto Ricans, Perales wrote in his letter to the island's governor.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg; it will get worse as more stateside governments continue to question any documents presented by Puerto Ricans," Perales said. "The governor and his staff keep saying they will communicate aspects of the law, but these kinds of incidences tell me nothing has been done. Puerto Ricans are in danger of being marginalized in a way they can not afford."

In the letter to the governor of Puerto Rico, Perales states that the "best way to address this problem is to allow all birth certificates to remain valid through the end of the year, until all state agencies have been properly informed, the necessary protections for all Puerto Ricans have been put in place, and Puerto Rico's Demographic Registry Offices are adequately staffed and trained to handle all requests for birth certificates in a prompt and timely manner."

Under the law, every birth certificate issued in Puerto Rico will become invalid on July 1, 2010. After that date, those wanting proof that they were born on the island must apply to the commonwealth government for a new birth certificate.

Many stateside Puerto Ricans have expressed confusion and lack of information about the new law and its impact. The U.S. State Department has not yet decided how to deal with people who present invalidated birth certificates for passports, according to a spokesperson.

Thus far, there seems to be little effort by the U.S. or Puerto Rico governments to educate people about the changes.

People born in Puerto Rico, a U.S. commonwealth, are U.S. citizens at birth.

Declaring Puerto Rican birth certificates invalid will fuel the escalating mandate to document the identity of Latinos for obtaining jobs, driver's licenses, and government benefits and create very serious problems for many Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Rico's legislature said they passed the law after raids last March broke up a criminal ring that had stolen thousands of birth certificates and other identifying documents from several different schools in Puerto Rico.

Commonwealth Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock said he opposed delaying the law. He added the government's media blitz especially planned to target large stateside Puerto Rican populations in Orlando and New York City. But even though the Secretary of State has made public statements about a media campaign, the problems continue to escalate.

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About LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Founded as the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund in 1972, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has won landmark civil rights cases in education, housing, voting, migrant, immigrant, employment and other civil rights. LatinoJustice PRLDEF has fought for the right of non-English speaking students to get a good education, against housing discrimination in city-owned apartments, and to open up employment opportunities for all citizens.

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