

# Citizenship Fee Hike Goes Into Effect At Midnight

KTLA

A flood of U.S. citizenship applications were filed in the Southland attempting to beat a 69 percent fee increase that takes effect Monday.

Volunteers helped prospective citizens fill out paperwork at community centers across Southern California, and one activist said his group was on target to help 25,000 people apply this July, compared with the normal 1,000 applications per month.

Juan Jose Gutierrez, national coordinator of Latino Movement USA, said dozens of other groups were helping thousands of other applicants. Gutierrez says the citizenship drive will likely result in tens of thousands of new voters ahead of the 2008 presidential election.

"That probably means a Democratic Party candidate rather than an erratic candidate stuck in Cold War-era policies," Gutierrez said.

On Monday, a fee hike will increase processing costs from the current \$400 to \$675.

Dozens of volunteers gathered at the NALEO Educational Fund headquarters to help legal permanent residents apply for citizenship.

Applicants must postmark their applications before Monday to avoid paying the new \$675 fee.

Since the citizenship drive started in January, NALEO organizers said filings for citizenship applications nationwide increased more than 65 percent for the first part of the year compared to the same time period last year. Los Angeles has seen an increase of 110 percent.

From July 30, legal residents -- who now pay \$330 to file a citizenship application and an additional \$70 for fingerprinting -- could have to shell out upwards of \$675 for the service. That does not include fees charged by service providers, which could bump up application costs to about \$1,000, Gutierrez said.

According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the fees are needed to speed up the application process and balance the agency's budget.

There's still time to turn in applications, the LAX Airport Station post office in Westchester will post mark mail until midnight tonight, according to Gutierrez.

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