
(September 17, 2008) Southtown Star: CHANCE AT U.S. RESIDENCY | Bill to let French widow stay here

'My dream ... may actually be granted'

CHANCE AT U.S. RESIDENCY | Bill to let French widow stay here clears House, heads to Senate

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BY SHAMUS TOOMEY Staff Reporter

In January, Corina Turcinovic was minutes away from being deported to her native France.

The West Beverly woman who cared for her paralyzed husband for 14 years was in federal custody in the back of an SUV en route to O'Hare Airport when a temporary, last second reprieve turned the SUV around.

On Tuesday, the U.S. House took a big step in ending her deportation fears for good.

In a rare move, the House passed a "private bill" that would allow the widow to remain in the U.S. and apply for permanent legal residency. It was the first such private bill - aimed at just one person - to clear the House since May, 2006.

The Senate now must pass it, something its House sponsor, U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Chicago), hopes will happen this year. Lawmakers are hesitant to support bills helping just one person, particularly in immigration cases, Lipinski said.

"But once I had an opportunity to explain the case, everyone has said to me they understand this was a mistake - a series of mistakes - by the immigration service" that needed to be rectified, Lipinski said.

Turcinovic came to the U.S. legally in 1990 when her then-fiance, Maro, was hit by a car while visiting the country. A hospital mistake left him a quadriplegic. Turcinovic was only allowed to stay for 90 days, but chose to overstay the limit to care for Maro. They later married.

Maro's application to become a U.S. citizen stalled when immigration officials demanded he show up to be fingerprinted, which he couldn't do. In 2004, while waiting for an agent to come to his bedside to take his prints, Maro died.

His naturalization was his wife's best chance to stay here legally. Three years after he died, she was arrested, jailed and scheduled to be deported.

Since being released from jail in January, Turcinovic, 44, has savored her freedom - and her adopted hometown of Chicago, attending every neighborhood festival she could find.

"For months now I have been feeling like a tiny donkey climbing up the mountain, carrying a huge load 10 times its size," Turcinovic said. "Today, some of it just got removed. Now I know I still have some way to go, but I feel lighter and more confident. It starts to feel like my dream of reaching the peak may actually be granted in the end."