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Pasadena ISD ordered to reinstate illegal aliens

By JON VERBOON
Houston Chronicle

A federal judge Tuesday ordered the Pasadena Independent School District to reinstate four illegal alien custodians fired in February because they gave false Social Security numbers to district officials.

The four, all with several years experience with the district, violated district policy by giving the false numbers.

Their attorney, Isaias Torres, argued in court that they were caught in a "Catch-22" situation. Since all four have been in this country since 1982, they qualify under a 1986 immigration act to apply for legal status. But their chances of approval are diminished if

they are unemployed, Torres told U.S. District Judge Gabrielle McDonald.

He said the four custodians had no way of obtaining valid Social Security numbers because of their illegal status and that the mechanism to allow them to work legally while their residency applications are being processed does not exist now.

McDonald, in ordering the workers reinstated with back pay, agreed with Torres.

She said Congress, in passing the immigration law, did not intend to put applicants "between a rock and a hard place."

The firing of aliens for no reason other than giving a false Social Security number violates the law's intent, she said.

The workers are Maria Hernandez, Reina Raquel

Guillen, Blanca Lydia Lopez and Maria Antonia Garza.

Pasadena ISD attorney Kelly Frels said the workers knew they were wrong to submit false Social Security numbers and knew they would be fired if caught doing so.

He said the numbers were found to be false after the four completed the new W-4 tax forms.

Frels also argued there had been no attempt to discriminate against the four Hispanics or "they wouldn't have been hired in the first place."

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of about 100 Hispanic employees of the district.

McDonald said the application of the district policy was discriminatory because Hispanics would be the ones most likely affected.

Pasadena schools ordered to rehire illegal aliens



Post photo by Manuel M. Chavez

Attorney Torres with Garza, left, Hernandez, Guillen and Lopez after ruling announced.

Decision sets precedent

By **PATRICIA MANSON**
Post Reporter

A Houston federal judge Tuesday ordered Pasadena school officials to rehire four undocumented workers who filed a class-action lawsuit after they were fired from their jobs as custodians.

Attorneys on both sides of the case said the ruling by U.S. District Judge Gabrielle McDonald was the first in the nation on a facet of the new immigration law.

Pasadena Independent School District officials fired the four because they listed false Social Security numbers on their job applications.

McDonald ruled that the terminations violated the anti-discrimination clause of the immigration act that went into effect last fall.

McDonald said the district's

policy of firing those who list false Social Security numbers on their job applications discriminates against Hispanics eligible to become citizens.

The four workers — Maria Olympia Hernandez, Reina Raquel Guillen, Blanca Lydia Lopez and Maria Antonia Garza — said through an interpreter that they were surprised and pleased with the judge's decision.

"The clear message that she (the judge) is sending is that employers should be very careful before they take any kind of action against an employee because of their immigration status," said Isaias Torres, one of the plaintiffs' lawyers.

Attorney Kelly Frels, who represented the school district, said of

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