

Asbury Park Attorney Warns Haitian Residents to Beware of Scams

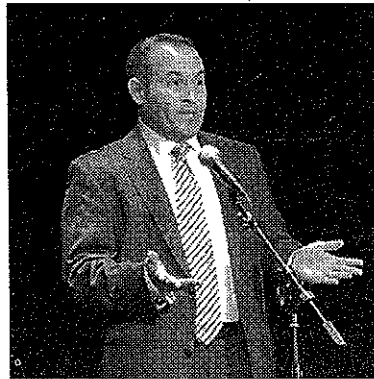
By PAUL BOOTH

Even as many Haitian immigrants struggle to collect information about their loved ones in Haiti a new threat looms.

Daniel Weiss, an immigration lawyer and member of the Asbury Park Board of Education, warns local residents to beware of those attempting to cash in on their grief.

The Obama administration has declared that Temporary Protective Status (TPS), historically given in times of war, famine and natural disaster, will be offered to Haitian immigrants living illegally within United States borders as of Jan. 12, the date of the massive earthquake that ravaged the island nation last week.

This designation will protect



Coaster Photo
Daniel Weiss, an immigration lawyer and member of the Asbury Park Board of Education, cautioned Haitian immigrants, anxious to file for temporary status, to be wary of scams.

immigrants from deportation for 18 months, the maximum period of time allowed by law. Essentially, it provides a path to obtain papers to live and work within the U.S. while Haiti is rebuilt.

This poses hope for many area residents, but also represents cause for wariness and concern. In this time of unmeasured grief, coupled with never-before offered opportunity (Haitian immigrants have never been extended TPS), people can easily fall victim to fraud and abuse, Weiss said.

He told a crowd gathered Paramount Theater in Asbury Park Monday night to have their information in order so as to be prepared to file for TPS. He cautioned, however, against moving

too quickly or handing over money without demanding paperwork to be sure the information had been filed with the proper authorities.

In fact, Weiss said, it has not yet been determined which government agency will handle the temporary status requests, therefore nothing can yet be filed.

"Starting the day after TPS was announced I had people calling saying they already filed applications when that's not possible," Weiss said.

Weiss said those interested in finding information about TPS should consult the Department of Homeland Security's website (www.uscis.gov) or contact a lawyer.

"And people should demand a

photocopy of everything," he said, from the TPS petition to the check used for payment (never pay in cash), to the cover letter.

Weiss also cautioned that TPS is not for everyone. Those with criminal backgrounds probably wouldn't benefit from filing because they might not be eligible.

Weiss said the new protective status could benefit those with lapsed status in the community here, which he estimated in the hundreds, but people should be deliberate.

"This is a time to take a step back, get everything in order, and to understand your rights," he said.