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Friday, June 6, 2003

Immigration lawyers find their world has changed

Washington Business Journal - by [Greg A. Lohr](#) Staff reporter

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Attorney Michael Maggio sometimes feels more like a doctor -- one who must tell a patient there's no hope.

It's an apt analogy. Maggio is an immigration attorney, and since terrorists attacked New York and Washington on Sept. 11, 2001, he and other immigration specialists frequently have been the bearers of bad news.

The country's immigration policies and enforcement practices have been revised, reinforced and reinterpreted.

In short, the white-hot light on national security has made it more difficult for foreigners to come to America and more difficult for them to stay.

"Our clients are being impacted upon in heart-breaking kinds of ways," says Maggio, a senior partner with D.C. law firm Maggio Kattar ([www.maggio-kattar.com](#)). "We very often feel like doctors who have to tell a patient that their condition is terminal. But the reason their condition is terminal is because of a new Supreme Court decision or because of a decision by the INS to enforce the laws differently."

Some of the changes have come in the aftermath of legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security. Functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), once in the Justice Department, were shifted to units in Homeland Security, including the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services ([www.bcis.gov](#)) formed early this year.

Attorneys say this and more significant revisions to immigration policy have changed the types of cases they handle, complicated and delayed processes that used to be routine administrative matters and reduced in some instances the money they make on individual cases.

As a result, these attorneys say, they may rethink the way they bill foreign nationals and corporations with overseas interests. And at least one local expert predicts the altered immigration landscape ultimately could reduce the number of attorneys who offer immigration services.

"People who got into immigration law because they thought it was easy, I think you'll see them disappear," says Elissa McGovern, chairwoman of the 600-member Washington chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association ([www.aila.org](#)). "And the good attorneys, the ones who've been in the thick of it and have developed a reputation, will remain and will probably prosper."

legitimate questions

While Maggio is feeling like a doctor with a terminally ill patient, immigration lawyer Sudeep Bose is feeling more like someone in community relations.

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