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Settlement reached in immigration lawsuit

DES MOINES (AP) - Lawyers for immigrant workers arrested in a raid at a meat packing plant in Postville say they've reached an agreement with federal authorities that will keep the workers in Iowa, The Des Moines Register reported Saturday.

The agreement will allow 83 detained workers who were not criminally charged to remain in the state at least until their administrative bond hearings are held, the lawyers said.

That could take six months or more, the attorneys said. The deal was reached late Friday. Lawyers said they want to keep the workers from being shipped to other states and given new attorneys. The lawyers said that would deprive them of their rights to a vigorous defense.

"We wanted to make sure they had lawyers," said Amy Peck, an Omaha, Neb., lawyer who filed the lawsuit with other immigration attorneys. "This would also protect their due process rights."

Federal authorities raided the Agriprocessors Inc. plant on Monday, detaining 389 workers. It was called the largest single-site immigration raid in U.S. history.

Arrested in the raid were 306 immigrant workers charged with identity theft, misuse of a Social Security number or other fraud-related charges. Those who were arrested will remain in Iowa to face criminal charges.

The 83 workers who were not charged includes 62 who were released on humanitarian grounds but kept under supervision. Status and plea hearings are scheduled to begin Monday at the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo, where the workers were initially detained after the raid. All future proceedings will be held in U.S. District Court in Cedar Rapids.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday in U.S. District Court on behalf of three immigrant workers who were detained but later released. It alleges that federal authorities violated the workers' Fifth Amendment rights to due process by exposing them to "prolonged and indefinite detention," hindering their access to attorneys.