

LOCAL NEWS

P.R. joins petition on citizenship to U.S. Supreme Court

By EILEEN McNAMARA

The Associated Press

The government of Puerto Rico says the U.S. citizenship granted islanders by Congress is "inferior" and, to make the point, is backing a petition asking the U.S. Supreme Court to consider allowing Puerto Ricans to be naturalized.

David Efrón, a Cuban-born naturalized citizen who filed the petition on behalf of his Puerto Rico-born daughter, said he wants 15-year-old Jennifer to have citizenship that is protected by the Constitution, like his.

"This support from the Puerto Rican government gives

us a better chance of being heard by the court, although it's still not even a 50 percent chance," Efrón said Thursday.

Puerto Rico's Justice Department sent the friendly brief supporting Efrón's petition to the U.S. Supreme Court last week, government attorney Gustavo Gelpi said Thursday.

"It is a case of a person with an inferior type of United States citizenship seeking to fully perfect the same," the government brief says.

Efrón filed his petition a month ago, after losing appeals in Florida, where his daughter now lives.

The U.S. Supreme Court has not before heard a case relating to Puerto Ricans' citizenship.

Efrón's attorneys argue that since Congress passed a special law to grant U.S. citizenship to islanders in 1917, it also could revoke it — especially if the island became independent.

That prospect is remote since less than 5 percent of voters supported independence in recent plebiscites.

But it provides a good argument for people like Efrón and the governing pro-statehood New Progressive Party, who argue that statutory citizenship leaves the future status of some 6 million Puerto Ricans uncertain — 4 million here and another 2 million on the mainland.

"Persons born in Puerto Rico who currently enjoy such 'statutory' citizenship are assigned at best to a stigmatizing 'limbo' category," the government's brief said. "They are uncertain of their citizenship rights and are denied the opportunity to achieve assurance through naturalization of constitutionally protected citizenship."

Statehooders often complain that because the island is a territory, its U.S. citizens are treated differently. Efrón admits that his petition is "more than a case — it's a cause."



David Efrón

STAR file photo