

# AP Exclusive: US Hunts Evidence of Haitian Immigrant Crimes

## Emails obtained by Associated Press show Trump administration has been seeking histories of Haitians enrolled in Temporary Protected Status program

By **Alicia A. Caldwell**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has begun hunting for evidence of crimes committed by Haitian immigrants as it decides whether to allow them to continue in a humanitarian program that has shielded tens of thousands from deportation since a devastating earthquake.

The inquiries into any criminal histories of Haitian immigrants were made in internal U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services emails obtained by The Associated Press. They show the agency's policy chief also wanted to know how many of the roughly 50,000 Haitians enrolled in the Temporary Protected Status program

But Lapan's explanation doesn't seem to reflect the apparent importance placed on the questions by Kovarik, the Citizenship and Immigration Services head of policy and strategy, in repeated emails to her staff.

"I do want to alert you ... the secretary is going to be sending a request to us to be more responsive," Kovarik wrote on April 27. Addressing the inability of agency employees to gather the requested information about wrongdoing, she said: "I know some of it is not captured, but we'll have to figure out a way to squeeze more data out of our systems."

The request for criminal data for an entire ethnic community is unorthodox. The law doesn't specify it should be a

gally in the United States and has sought, unsuccessfully so far, to suspend refugee arrivals and temporarily block visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries. He has accused those in the U.S. illegally of fueling criminality.

It is unclear if the agency is asking such questions about other recipients of the temporary protection, including immigrants from Honduras and El Salvador.

Cheryl Little, executive director of Miami-based Americans for Immigrant Justice, said the emails show that Trump is looking to deny benefits to Haitians instead of considering their eligibility for special consideration. She said her Haitian clients with Temporary Protected Status already were terrified that their benefits would be revoked.

"Most of them have lived here upward of 15 years. They work hard. They pay taxes. They have U.S. citizen children. They contribute greatly to our economy," she said.

Trump courted the votes of Haitian-American citizens in the critical state of Florida. Campaigning in Miami's Little Haiti in September, he said, "The Haitian-American community deserves our gratitude and our respect, and I want you to know, you have my respect."

Temporary Protected Status is intended to be just that, temporary. The Obama administration included Haiti in the program shortly after the January 2010 earthquake killed as many as 300,000 people, destroyed much



AP PHOTO/GERALD HERBERT, FILE

In this Jan. 26, 2010, file photo, Haitian police use sticks to try and keep the crowd in order at a food distribution point in the Cite Soleil neighborhood in the aftermath of the Jan. 12 earthquake in Port-au-Prince. The Trump administration is hunting for evidence of crimes committed by Haitian immigrants as it decides whether to allow them to continue participating in a humanitarian program that has shielded tens of thousands from deportation since the 2010 earthquake. The Homeland Security Department has not made a final decision about Temporary Protected Status for Haiti and declined to comment on the pre-decisional process. The Obama administration included Haiti in the program shortly after the January 2010 earthquake that killed as many as 300,000 people and devastated schools, hospitals, homes and even entire neighborhoods.

**“The request fits in with President Donald Trump’s tough-on-immigration focus that is a core demand of his political supporters**

were taking advantage of public benefits, which they are not eligible to receive.

The emails don't make clear if Haitians' misdeeds will be used to determine whether they can remain in the United States. The program is intended to help people from places beset by war or disasters and, normally, the decision to extend it depends on whether conditions in the immigrants' home country have improved. But emails suggest Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, who will make the decision, is looking at other criteria.

Homeland Security spokesman David Lapan said Tuesday that criminal history and other information requested by policy chief Kathy Nuebel Kovarik won't be used to make a final decision. Lapan said the questions were asked so that Kelly could have a fuller understanding of who is participating in the program.

consideration for Temporary Protected Status, and the government has never said it would use criminal rates in deciding if a country's citizens should be allowed to stay under this program. Introducing new criteria is likely to cause consternation among law-abiding Haitians who may feel they are being penalized for the wrongdoing of others.

But the request fits in with President Donald Trump's tough-on-immigration focus that is a core demand of his political supporters. He has enhanced efforts to arrest people living ille-

of the capital and caused widespread damage in the southern part of the Caribbean nation. Since then, Haitians have been eligible to stay regardless of how they entered the United States — legally or illegally — as long as they were residing here before Jan. 12, 2011.

Eligibility for Haitians has been repeatedly extended and is to expire July 22. The Trump administration must decide by May 23 so that it can provide 60 days' notice about its plans.

USCIS' acting director has recommended letting the program expire. In an April 10 memo first reported by USA Today, James M c c a m e n t

said Haiti is no longer in crisis despite its poverty and political instability. However, he wants to allow the Haitians to stay until January so they have time to make arrangements to voluntarily leave. If they don't depart the U.S. by then, the government could move to deport them.

Still, Homeland Security's Kelly has the final

word. The emails inquiring about misdeeds were sent from April 7 to May 1.

In her first week on the job, Kovarik, the policy chief, asked officials how often Haitians with temporary status have been convicted of "crimes of any kind," and how many

See HAITI on page 11



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**WHEN:** MAY 17TH, 2017  
6:00 P.M.

**WHERE:** MODA CENTER/ ROSE ROOM  
1 North Center Court Street  
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Join us for refreshments and hear about the accomplishments of the Urban League of Portland over the last year. The Annual Meeting is an opportunity to learn about our work and to support the mission of our organization.

**THE ANNUAL MEETING IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. FREE PARKING GARDEN GARAGE**

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