

# NORTH CAROLINA LAWYERS WEEKLY

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## Would Superman Be An Illegal Alien?

### *Immigration Policies Under Review By Charlotte Commission*

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**Editor**

Sure, Superman is faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive.

But he'd be no match for U.S. immigration laws, says Charlotte lawyer Alan Gordon, a board-certified specialist.

Gordon uses the Superman metaphor to make a simple point.

"His situation shows how our immigration policy and system is broken," he says. "Superman flew across the border without permission, and he worked for the Daily Planet without permission. He obviously used false documentation to get his job and he made more than two illegal entries into the country as an adult without legal status."

Under immigration laws dating back to the 1950s, those transgressions would bar the famous superhero from getting legal immigrant status, Gordon says.

Even if Superman's boss wanted to sponsor him, he'd have to stand in a long line — about four years long. That's the lag time for getting a visa on a job where specialized skills or a college degree is required, according to Gordon.

Those problems mirror the ones that real immigrants face, says Gordon, who

chairs the newly formed Immigration Study Commission, a 26-member group in Charlotte.

Gordon was appointed by Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory. Other members include local law enforcement officials, representatives from the Department of Homeland Security, school officials and representatives from the construction industry.

The commission, apparently the first of its kind in the nation, is looking at "what the impact of immigration — legal and illegal — is on public safety, on education, on social services and on our job market," said McCrory.

"The topic areas show we have a need for foreign nationals and there are also costs involved, and that our community is discussing and looking at that dichotomy," Gordon says. "We're gathering information with regard to public schools and colleges, what professors are needed and what health officials are



Gordon

needed."

The focus on immigration is particularly timely. Comprehensive immigration bills are pending in the U.S. Congress, and various groups have just released reports on immigration trends:

- The Brookings Institution reported last week that Hispanics are being drawn to several North Carolina metropolitan areas, including Raleigh and Charlotte, where job prospects are strong. From 2000 to 2004, Hispanic populations grew by more than 40 percent in six metropolitan areas according to that study: Atlanta; Cape Coral, Fla.; Charlotte; Indianapolis; Nashville, Tenn. and Raleigh.

- A January 2006 report from UNC's business school, titled "The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of N.C.," reported that more than 506,000 Hispanics called North Carolina home in 2004 — more than 10 times the 43,000 Hispanics who lived here in 1970. The study found that Hispanics represent almost 30 percent of North Carolina's population increase since 1995, and that 55 percent of Hispanics residing in North Carolina are legal immigrants.

Illegal immigration is a hot button issue, but Gordon says that is only one facet of his commission's focus.

"This is not just about illegal

Mexicans," he says. "We need an enforcement policy, but we also need a way to see light at the end of the tunnel so they can earn legal status."

Gordon says local governments need to recognize a simple bottom-line reality: skilled immigrants are good for the economy.

The UNC study bears that out. It states: "Hispanics comprise 7 percent of North Carolina's overall workforce and considerably more in certain key sectors. This labor has allowed the state's economic output to expand. In its absence, a substantial portion of North Carolina's economic vitality would likely disappear."

The report also found that up to 29 percent of the state's construction labor force was Hispanic, a crucial statistic for metropolitan areas like Charlotte and Raleigh.

"Yes, immigrants will need education and services," Gordon says. "But on the other side is the shortage of science and math teachers and our need to bring them in from overseas. And we're going to open a biotech center in Kannapolis, so we'll need to bring in workers for that, and the best and brightest scholars."

"The U.S. is the land of opportunity, and business is part of that opportunity," Gordon says.