



episcopal community services of long island

www.ecslongisland.org

(516) 248-4800 EXT. 15

DISCLAIMER: The following information is not legal advice. It is for educational and informational purposes only. If you need legal advice, consult a licensed immigration attorney or an accredited representative from a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) recognized agency. An undocumented immigrant should not seek legal advice from a notario or an "immigration consultant" who is not accredited by the BIA

DISCLAIMER: The following information is not legal advice. It is for educational and informational purposes only. If you need legal advice, consult a licensed immigration attorney or an accredited representative from a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) recognized agency. An undocumented immigrant should not seek legal advice from a notario or an "immigration consultant" who is not accredited by the BIA.

Eligibility requirements for U.S. Citizenship

To be eligible for citizenship or naturalization, you must meet the following requirements:

1. You must be 18 years of age or older.
2. You must have been a legal permanent resident for 5 years, or 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen.
 - If you served in the U.S. Armed Forces, you may be eligible even if you are not a legal permanent resident.
 - If you are a refugee, 5 years begins on the date you entered the U.S.
3. You must be physically present in the U.S. for at least half of the required residency period.
4. You must not have abandoned residency in the U.S.
5. You must be willing to swear loyalty to the U.S.
6. You must have good moral character.
7. You must demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government.
8. You must read, write, and speak basic English, unless you qualify for one of the following exemptions:
 - To take the U.S. history and government test in your native language, you must be 55 years of age and have been a legal permanent resident for at least 15 years, OR be 50 years of age and a legal permanent resident for at least 20 years.
 - To take a simplified version of the U.S. history and government test, you must be 65 years of age and have been a legal permanent resident for at least 20 years.

Are there any Barriers to Becoming a U.S. Citizen?

Yes. If you have experienced any of the following or other situations not listed, it is recommended that you see an expert in immigration law before applying for citizenship.

- You made trips out of the U.S. for more than 6 months.
- You moved to another country since receiving your green card.

- You are in deportation (removal) proceedings, or have been deported.
- You have not filed your federal income taxes.
- You have not provided financial support for your children.
- You are a male and have not registered with the Selective Service.
- You have been arrested, convicted, or have committed a crime.
- You have ever been involved with drugs, prostitution, polygamy, firearms, domestic abuse, or child abuse.
- You committed fraud to enter the United States or get your green card, or you were not eligible when you originally got your green card.
- You lied or committed fraud to receive public benefits.
- You falsely claimed to be a U.S. citizen.
- You helped someone enter the U.S. illegally, even if they were your family.

The Advantages of U.S. Citizenship Include:

- You can file to bring family members, such as children, parents, brothers and sisters to live in the United States.
- The process of reuniting your family usually goes much faster if you are a citizen.
- Becoming a U.S. citizen can help your children. Unmarried permanent resident children under age 18 automatically become citizens when one or both parents become citizens.
- You have the right to vote in all elections.
- You can be elected to public office.
- You can live and travel outside of the U.S. without losing your citizenship.
- Many federal jobs require you to be a U.S. citizen.
- Traveling in some foreign countries may be easier for a citizen of the U.S.
- As a citizen, you can receive full social security benefits, even while living in foreign countries, as long as you are eligible for them and depending on the foreign country.

The Disadvantages of U.S. Citizenship Include:

- If you become a citizen, you may have difficulty maintaining ownership of property in another country.
- You may lose your right to vote in your native country.
- You may lose your citizenship in your native country, unless your native country allows you to hold dual citizenship (citizenship in two countries).

Getting help from Episcopal Community Services of Long Island

New clients can call 718-465-8585 to inquire about intake sessions and legal advice. New clients are encouraged to contact ECS as soon as they are aware that they have a legal issue. Since there is a high demand for low-income legal representation, there is frequently a waiting list for services.

All services are confidential. ECS is a small non-profit organization, but does ask a small case fee of clients. The fee can be waived in certain circumstances, and *no one will be denied service if they are unable to pay.*

If you want to apply on your own for naturalization, you can call the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at 1-800-870-3676 or go to their website www.uscis.gov to get copies of application forms. However, ECS does NOT recommend going through the process on your own if any of the barriers to citizenship apply to you.