



## **CITIZENSHIP FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS**



**Q: Are there any special citizenship benefits for non-citizens who join the U.S. military?**

**A:** Yes! A permanent resident alien must normally be a “green card holder”, also known as a legal permanent resident (LPR) for 5 years before he or she can apply for naturalization to become a U.S. citizen. However, if you have served in the U.S. military for more than a day during times of hostility – which have existed in the U.S. since 9/11 - you can immediately apply for citizenship. The Army will assist you by preparing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) Form N-426 “Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service” which certifies your honorable service on active duty. This is done on the Fort Benning post by the Military Personnel Division, which is located at Servicemembers Plaza. You can submit this document while you are in basic training or any time thereafter. The United States Citizen and Immigration Service (USCIS) processes Form N-426 while processing your application for citizenship, which is a USCIS Form N-400 “Application for Naturalization.”

**Q: Do servicemembers have to pay the same fee for the application process as non-servicemembers have to pay?**

**A:** No! All fees are waived for servicemembers. The fees for family members still apply, however.

**Q: Are there special citizenship processing benefits for servicemembers?**

**A:** Yes! Fort Benning, as the initial entry point for many servicemembers, has representatives from USCIS onpost to assist several days a week. They have offices at Sand Hill and meet regularly with entry-level trainees to help with the process, but they will also meet with other servicemembers seeking naturalization and offer similar assistance, such as reviewing forms before submission for processing. For other posts, there is a special address that the application for naturalization can be sent to for expedited processing.

**Q: Are there other qualifications for citizenship, even for servicemembers?**

**A:** Yes. In general, a servicemember applicant for naturalization must:

- Have served honorably in active-duty status, or as a member of the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve, for any amount of time during a designated period of hostilities and, if separated from the U.S. armed forces, have been separated honorably;
- Have been lawfully admitted as a permanent resident at any time after enlistment or induction, **OR** have been physically present in the United States or certain territories at the time of enlistment or induction (regardless of whether the applicant was admitted as a permanent resident);

- Be able to read, write, and speak basic English;
- Have a knowledge of U.S. history and government (civics);
- Have been a person of good moral character during all relevant periods under the law; and
- Have an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and be well disposed to the good order and happiness of the U.S. during all relevant periods under the law.

**Q: Are there special benefits for non-citizen family members of U.S. service members?**

**A:** Yes. Spouses of U.S. citizen service members who are (or will be) deployed may be eligible for expedited naturalization in the United States under Section 319(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In general, an applicant for naturalization under section 319(b) of the INA must:

- Be age 18 or older;
- Establish that his or her U.S. citizen spouse is deployed abroad as a service member;
- Be present in the U.S. pursuant to a lawful admission for permanent residence (green card holder) at the time of examination on the naturalization application;
- Be present in the U.S. at the time of naturalization;
- Declare in good faith upon naturalization an intent to reside abroad with the U.S. citizen spouse and to reside in the U.S. immediately upon the citizen spouse's termination of service abroad;
- Be able to read, write, and speak basic English;
- Have a basic knowledge of U.S. history and government (civics); and
- Have been, and continue to be, a person of good moral character, attached to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the U.S. during all relevant periods under the law.

The spouse must still be an LPR and residing with and married to the service member for three years, but times separated due to deployment are included in that three-year calculation. Natural children whose parents naturalize before the 18th birthday of the child can file N600; stepchildren cannot file N600, unless they've been legally adopted.

**Q: Are there special benefits for non-citizen family members of U.S. service members who die in combat?**

**A:** Yes. If you are the spouse, child, or parent of a U.S. citizen who died as a result of combat while serving in active duty status in the U.S. armed forces, you may be eligible for immigration benefits as an "immediate relative" for up to 2 years after your service member relative's death.

Additionally, a surviving spouse, child, or parent of such servicemembers may be eligible for naturalization as the surviving relative of the servicemember under Section 319(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

**Q: But what about undocumented aliens living in the United States? Can they join the military?**

**A:** Individuals seeking to join the U.S. military must first obtain legal status to be and remain in the United States. The U.S. Army allows lawful permanent residents to join the Army. Each year, the military accepts approximately 5,000 non-U.S. citizens into the military. Nearly all of them are permanent residents. In 2006, the military began to accept a few applicants with student or even tourist visas – but only those with skills in high demand.

It is possible that in the future some undocumented aliens in the United States may be accepted for service in the U.S. Army if they have special skills in high demand. The program is called Military Accessions in the National Interest (MAVNI), and it is open to immigrants without a proper visa if they came to the U.S. with their parents before age 16. Just like permanent residents seeking military service, they must first straighten out their legal status and be approved under a 2012 Presidential policy known as Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA).

More information for U.S. service members seeking to naturalize can be found on the USCIS website at <http://www.uscis.gov/military/citizenship-military-personnel-family-members/citizenship-military-members>. For more information on possible expedited naturalization for family members of deploying service members, please see <http://www.uscis.gov/military/citizenship-military-personnel-family-members/citizenship-spouses-and-children-military-members>.. For information on special survivor citizenship benefits, please see <http://www.uscis.gov/military/family-based-survivor-benefits/survivor-benefits-relatives-us-citizen-military-members>.



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