

INFORMATION ON GREEN CARDS AND CITIZENSHIP FOR CO-SPONSORED CLIENTS

Due to the ongoing pandemic, IRIS' remote work, and high client demand, Immigration Legal Services is not scheduling any in-person or telephonic appointments at the time of first contact. Rather, clients requesting legal services are placed on a waitlist and given a checklist of documents and information to gather for their specific application. The client may begin gathering these materials and sending them to Ben Kline immediately. However, there is currently a 4-6 week wait time between a client's first contact and when the attorney will be able to virtually meet with them to discuss and review their application.

Green Cards

- Clients are eligible to apply for Green Cards from the 366th day after arrival. IRIS Immigration and Legal Services (ILS) has attorneys on staff to assist IRIS clients through this process.
- Due to attorney preference as well as attorney/client privilege, co-sponsors will not participate in meetings between clients and their attorney. The clients must bring their own interpreter. Given the sensitive nature of events that must be recounted during the meeting, children should not be present during the appointment.
- The client may contact the IRIS ILS Paralegal, Mr. Ben Kline, via email bkline@irisct.org up to four weeks prior to the one year anniversary of arrival for the first available appointment (co-sponsors may assist with this).
- The Green Card process will also require medical examinations that must be conducted by a civil surgeon. The attorney will be able to provide additional information regarding these details and others at the client's appointment. Please do not contact your case manager with questions about green cards – this is a conversation for the attorney. USCIS waives green card application fees for refugees.

Citizenship

IRIS Clients may contact IRIS ILS to schedule an appointment to begin the citizenship process up to 4 months prior to the 5-year anniversary of the family's arrival in the US. To schedule an appointment, contact Mr. Ben Kline at bkline@irisct.org.

Please note the following important information from IRIS ILS regarding the process:

English Language Skills

Eligibility for citizenship involves English language skills. Each client must be able to speak with a level of proficiency such that they can carry on a casual conversation with the immigration

officer as well as discuss all the details of their personal history from memory. They must do this without assistance from anyone. Clients must also have the ability to read and write in English. They will be tested on this. Their language skills need not be perfect, but they must be good. Generally, no family members or interpreters are permitted inside the interview room. The attorney will only work with clients who are able to demonstrate their English language skills at the time that they begin the application process. If it is clear that a client cannot read or write well, or needs to work on conversation, they should not contact our office until after they have spent time improving their skills. *It is important for clients to know these requirements and to know that the attorney will first assess their English language ability before accepting them as clients.*

Clients Who Have Already Contacted IRIS

If there are clients that you know of who do not have English language skills who have already contacted the IRIS office and been put on the Legal Department waitlist, please let the legal office know. It would be helpful to them to manage the influx of cases. If you know clients who have some English but you cannot assess their skill level, the attorney will do so. If the attorney decides their skills are not yet at the requisite level, she will recommend that they keep studying and/or take a class and then contact IRIS again after 6 months have passed so that she can reassess their skills.

Civics Test

Clients will also have to learn 100 civics questions to pass their citizenship interview.¹ The IRIS attorney strongly recommends that clients do NOT start studying these questions now but rather focus on their English language skills, including practicing conversation. The civics questions should be the last stage in the process and they can start studying those several months after the application is actually submitted. Clients who need to should focus on improving their English speaking, reading and writing.

Government Timeframe

The citizenship process can take up to 1 year after submission of the application due to USCIS processing times. This timeframe could be delayed due to the pandemic. Clients should anticipate the citizenship process being a long one.

¹ On February 22, 2021, USCIS announced that effective March 1, 2021, they will revert to the 2008 naturalization civics test containing 100 questions. USCIS further advises that applicants who filed their naturalization applications on or after Dec. 1, 2020, but before March 1, 2021, with an initial examination (interview) before April 19, 2021, will have the choice to either take the 2008 civics test or the 2020 civics test. USCIS will notify applicants who are affected by the change. If the initial interview is scheduled on or after April 19, 2021, applicants will take the 2008 civics test.