

CITIZENSHIP

NATURALIZATION THROUGH MILITARY SERVICE

If you are serving or have served in the U.S. armed forces and are interested in becoming a U.S. citizen, you may be eligible to apply for naturalization under special provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). Special provisions of the INA have authorized U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), historically, to expedite the application and naturalization process for current members of the U.S. armed forces and veterans. Since 2001, over 100,000 service members—including lawful permanent residents (LPRs)—have naturalized through expedited citizenship, according to a 2018 report by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC). However, previous policy changes under the U.S. Department of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis have effectively and indefinitely halted this expedited program for LPRs. As a result of the changes in DoD policy (summarized below), the number of service members who have applied for and earned U.S. citizenship through military service [dropped 65 percent](#).

This lesson provides an overview of application requirements for citizenship or naturalization: specifically, important eligibility criteria; policy changes that may impact your eligibility; and available benefits.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR U.S. CITIZENSHIP?

If you meet all of the requirements of either section 328 or 329 of INA, you may apply for naturalization by filing [Form N-400](#) under the section that applies to you. You will not have to pay any fees for applying for naturalization under INA 328 or 329. As a member or veteran of the U.S. military, certain other naturalization requirements may not apply to you; for example, you may not have to reside in or be physically present in the U.S. for any length of time before you apply for naturalization. The requirements for naturalization are explained in greater detail below.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR EXPEDITED NATURALIZATION

Generally, qualifying military service includes service with one of the following: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard or National Guard. In addition, spouses of members of the U.S. armed forces who are or will be deployed may be eligible for expedited naturalization. Other

provisions of the law also allow certain spouses to complete the naturalization process abroad, which will be discussed in the following lesson, "Citizenship for Family Members." A member of the U.S. armed forces must meet the requirements and qualifications to become a citizen of the United States. He or she must demonstrate:

- Good moral character
- Knowledge of the English language
- Knowledge of U.S. government and history (civics)
- Attachment to the principles of the Constitution of the United States by taking an Oath of Allegiance to the United States

Qualified members of the U.S. armed forces may be exempt from other naturalization requirements, including residence and physical presence in the United States. These exceptions are listed in Sections 328 and 329 of the INA.

- All aspects of the naturalization process, including applications, interviews and ceremonies are available overseas to members of the U.S. armed forces and certain "command-sponsored" spouses.
- A person who obtains U.S. citizenship through his or her military service and separates from the military under "other than honorable conditions" before completing five years of honorable service may have his or her citizenship revoked.

POLICY CHANGES TO NATURALIZATION PROCESS

On October 13, 2017, the U.S. Department of Defense Secretary made the following key policy changes to the expedited naturalization process:

- **Complete Background Screening Requirements before Basic Training**—Foreign nationals and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) must now complete and pass background screenings before attending basic training. Prior to this change, you were allowed to start your basic training as long as your background screenings were initiated.
- **Complete at least 180 days of active duty service before receiving a certificate of honorable service**—Foreign nationals and LPRs must complete at least 180 days of consecutive active duty service, and the Secretary of the appropriate Military Department

must characterize their service as honorable before they can receive a certificate of honorable service (USCIS Form N-426), which is a required first step in the application process for U.S. citizenship. Additionally, the Secretary must also sign the Form N-426 before you can file your application for naturalization. Before this change, you could receive a certificate of honorable service and submit the form to your personnel office to complete the form.

- This change applies to those seeking Form N-426 before and after October 13, 2017. If your Form N-426 was issued to an officer who did not have the required security clearance, your certificate may be recalled or decertified.

For additional information on how you may be impacted by these policy changes, visit: [Changes to the Expedited Naturalization Process for Military Service Members](#).

SERVICE IN PEACETIME

Section 328 of the INA applies to all members of the U.S. armed forces and those already discharged from service. An individual may qualify for naturalization if he or she has fulfilled all of these requirements:

- Served honorably in the U.S. armed forces for at least one year.
- Obtained lawful permanent resident status.
- Meets the other general requirements for naturalization.

SERVICE DURING PERIODS OF HOSTILITIES

The President signed an executive order on July 3, 2002, authorizing all noncitizens who have served honorably in the U.S. armed forces on or after Sept. 11, 2001, to file for citizenship under section 329 of the INA. Section 329 also covers veterans of certain designated past wars and conflicts. The authorization related to the War on Terrorism will remain in effect until a date designated by a future presidential executive order.

NATURALIZATION AT BASIC TRAINING

USCIS established the Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative in August 2009 which allows the Army to give noncitizen enlistees the opportunity to naturalize when they graduate from basic training. Under this initiative, USCIS conducts all naturalization processing including the capture of

biometrics, the naturalization interview and administration of the *Oath of Allegiance* on the military installation. Since 2009 USCIS has expanded the initiative to the Navy, Air Force, and finally to the Marine Corps in 2013, giving enlistees of these branches equal opportunity to (in most cases) leave basic training as U.S. citizens.

POSTHUMOUS BENEFITS

Section 329A of the INA provides for grants of posthumous citizenship to certain members of the U.S. armed forces. A member of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably during a designated period of hostility and died as a result of injury or disease incurred in or aggravated by that service (including death in combat) may be eligible to receive posthumous citizenship, as long as the next-of-kin applies for posthumous citizenship within two years of the service member's death. Other provisions of the law extend immigration benefits to the service member's surviving spouse, children and parents.

HOW TO APPLY

Every military installation has a designated point-of-contact, generally in the personnel division or the Judge Advocate General's Office, to assist members of the military prepare and file their naturalization application packet generally during basic training. That packet includes:

- USCIS [Form N-400, Application for Naturalization](#) (Members of the military are not charged a fee to file the Form N-400.)
- USCIS [Form N-426, Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service](#) (The military must certify this form before sending it to USCIS. Individuals separated from the military may submit an uncertified Form N-426 with their DD Form 214.)

Once the packet is complete, send it to the address listed on the [form's web page](#).

CUSTOMER SERVICE TO ASSIST THE MILITARY

USCIS customer service specialists are available to respond to inquiries from military members and their families Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Central), except federal holidays.

Military families may contact USCIS by:

- Calling the military toll-free telephone help line – 877-CIS-4MIL (247-4645), or

- Sending an e-mail to the military customer service specialists at: militaryinfo@uscis.dhs.gov.

MILITARY HELP LINE

We have established a toll-free military help line, 877-CIS-4MIL (247-4645), and e-mail address at militaryinfo@uscis.dhs.gov exclusively for current members of the military and their families as well as veterans. Our customer service specialists are available to answer calls Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Central), excluding federal holidays.

If you call after hours, you will receive an email address to contact us for assistance with immigration-related information, such as:

- Checking the status of your Form N-400, Application for Naturalization.
- Notifying us of a new mailing address or duty station.
- Obtaining posthumous citizenship for a deceased member of the U.S. armed forces.
- Submitting an application for expedited processing specific to military N-400 and N-600 applications.

Members of the U.S. armed forces and their families stationed in the U.S. or overseas may access the help line using the toll-free number through their base telephone operator or using the Defense Switched Network (DSN).

Operators will ask members of the general public to call our main customer service line available under the [Contact Us](#) link.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES

[Naturalization Through Military Service: Fact Sheet – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#)

RESOURCES

FIND A VA FACILITY

Use the [facility locator](#) or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

CONTACT YOUR COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

CalVet strongly recommends you work with the CVSO nearest you. Your CVSO can guide you through the benefits and services available as well as help connect you with other local resources.

The County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) are locally funded agencies established to assist veterans and their families in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service.

These County Veteran Service Offices promote the interest and welfare of veterans, their dependents, and their survivors by enhancing their quality of life through counseling, education, benefits assistance, and advocacy. They connect veterans to their benefits by assisting in their interactions with the VA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Visit the [CalVet](#) website for more information, OR

Find the [CVSO](#) closest to you.

VA HOTLINES

[Veterans Crisis Line](#)

- 800-273-TALK (8255), or
- Text: 838255

[Combat Call Center](#)

- 877-WAR-VETS (927-8387)

[Women Veterans Call Center](#)

- 855-VA-WOMEN (829-6636)

SOURCES

USCIS Military <https://www.uscis.gov/military>

CDSS Immigration Services <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Immigration-Services>

USCIS Citizenship for Family Members <https://www.uscis.gov/military/citizenship-family-members>