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U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents residing in the United States must file Form I-130, a petition for a relative of a foreigner, with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This can be done electronically or through the traditional paper process by mail. To learn more about USCIS and access forms and instructions, please click here. Petitions from Inside the United States of U.S. citizens and legitimate permanent resident sponsors residing in the United States must file An I-130, Petition for Alien Relatives, with the USCIS Chicago Lockbox facility, following instructions on the USCIS website. U.S. employers must file a Form I-140, a petition for foreign workers, according to instructions on the USCIS website. Petitions are filed from outside the United States While most immigrant visa petitions are filed in the United States, filing some types of petitions outside the United States is possible. Learn about petitioning outside the United States. Petition Approval your immigrant application must be approved by USCIS before your case can proceed to the National Visa Center. Page 2 After the USCIS approves your application, they will transfer your case to the State Department's National Visa Center (NVC) for pre-processing. The first step in this treatment is to create your case in our system. Once this is complete, we will send you an email or physical mail. With the information detailed in this letter, you can log into our Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) to check your status, receive messages and manage your case. Once you submit your fees, forms and supporting documents to THE NVC, we will review your case to make sure that you have provided all the documentation you need to schedule an immigrant visa interview. Interviews are based on the availability of appointments offered at the Embassy/Consulate. To determine which cases NVC is currently considering, please refer to the NVC Timeframes page on the right navigation strip. Page 3 Step 3: Paying fees is the first thing you need to do after receiving the NVC Welcome Letter to pay processing fees. There are two processing fees: Immigration Visa Application Processing Fee Affidavit Support Fee You will need a bank routing number and a checking or savings account number from a bank based in the US. To pay your fee, log in to your case at CEAC and click the PAY NOW button under oath of support or IV fee on your resume page. Please note that you cannot pay these two fees at the same time; The online system will ask you to pay them one at a time. After sending payments online, please allow up to 1 for NVC to handle your fees before moving on to the next step. You won't be able to access the DS-260 form until NVC processes your payments. PREVIOUS STEP: NVC PROCESSING NEXT STEP: AFFIDAVIT OF SUPPORT You Should HAVE lived in the United States as a green card holder for at least five years (or at least three years if you are married to a U.S. citizen). Continuously means that you do not take any travel outside the United States that each lasted six months or longer for 3-5 years you must have a green card (plus an additional period while the USCIS handles your application for U.S. citizenship). In other words, you can leave the United States - just make sure to return for six months each time. IMPORTANT: If you leave the United States for more than six months as a green card holder, USCIS will assume that you have renounced your permanent residence in the United States and they will deny your application for U.S. citizenship. There are ways to overcome this presumption, even if you take an extended trip abroad. The chance of success, however, depends on several factors: How long you have stayed outside the United States As convincing your reason was not to return before the REASON of the USCIS Officer assessing your application (officers can still refuse your application based on other reasons, including if you have taken frequent trips abroad) Those who apply for naturalization on the basis of a certain period or type of military service should not meet this continuous presence requirement. See this entitlement chart to find out when some military personnel may apply for naturalization. You can apply for naturalization as early as 90 days before you finish waiting the required three or five years. Our guide to the N-400 has more information. To avoid being denied citizenship, you need to convince a USCIS employee evaluating your application that you were not going to give up permanent residence in the United States during the time you were abroad (more than six months, but less than one year). To do this, you need to provide proof that you had strong ties to the United States. These data may show, for example, what you are: Saved your job in the United States and did not look for work while abroadin the closest relatives who stayed in the United StatesKept your home in the United StatesEnrolled your children to an American schoolif you stayed abroad for one year or longer, USCIS automatically assume that you have given up your permanent residence in the United States. They will deny your application for U.S. citizenship, and you will have to wait before you can reapply. If you have had to wait five years to apply for citizenship, you will need to wait at least four years and one day on your return from a trip abroad to apply. If you have had to wait three years to apply for citizenship (as a U.S. citizen spouse), you will need to wait at least two years and one day on your return from a trip abroad to reapply. To avoid the presumption that you have given up a permanent resident status it is important to take certain precautions before leaving the United States. Apply for entry permit. If you expect to be required to stay abroad for at least one year, it is important to apply for an entry permit (using Form I-131, officially called the Travel Document Application) before leaving the United States. IMPORTANT: Form I-131 is used to apply for entry permit and a typical travel view. But these two permits - although both are designed to allow a traveler to return to the United States on return from a trip abroad - are not the same: entry permits are issued to current green card holders, while travel permits are issued to green card applicants. You will need to provide biometrics while you are in the United States, but you can request to collect entry permits from the U.S. Embassy or consulate in the country where you plan to visit (or ask for expedited processing if your trip is due to an emergency). The return permit is valid for two years and cannot be renewed, so you must return up to two years completed. Otherwise, you will most likely not be allowed to return to the United States.2 Apply to maintain your permanent residence. You will be allowed to maintain your permanent resident status if you have to stay abroad for one year or longer because of your work, but this must be a certain type of work approved by the U.S. government. (USCIS lists the types of employment that qualify.) To apply for the preservation of your permanent residence, you will need to submit Form N-470 (officially called the Residence Residency Application for Naturalization Purposes) to USCIS - in addition to applying for an entry permit (see above).3. Apply for a return resident visa. If you do not expect to stay abroad for one year or longer due to unforeseen circumstances such as emergency medical care, and therefore do not apply for an entry permit before leaving the United States, then it is important to apply for a resident visa return. You need to contact your nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate (at least three months before you plan to return to the United States) and follow their specific instructions for applying. The process usually involves filling out a DS-117 form (officially called the Return Resident Status Application) and interviewing a consular officer to determine whether you should obtain a return resident visa based on the evidence you provide. To apply for U.S. citizenship, you must physically live in the United States for at least half of five years (more specifically, 913 days, or approximately 2.5 years) or at least half three years (more specifically, 548 days, or just over 1.5 years) if you are married to a U.S. citizen. Although although Allowed to take several trips outside the United States while you wait 3-5 years, it is important to keep in mind the requirements for continuous living (see above) to make sure that you also meet the physical presence requirement. IMPORTANT: During a trip abroad, USCIS will take the days that you physically leave and return to the United States as the days that you are physically present in the United States. In other words, if you leave on January 1st and return on July 1, both days will be counted as days during which you were physically present in the United States. See this entitlement chart to find out how long some service members must physically live in the United States before applying for naturalization. Our naturalization partner RapidVisa will help you prepare for every important step in the naturalization process. Start now! The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) invites the public and other federal agencies to comment on this proposed expansion of the currently approved information collection. In accordance with the Paper Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, a notice of information collection is issued... The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), will submit the following information-gathering request to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and authorization under the Paper Reduction Act of 1995. The purpose of this notice is to allow an additional 30 days for ... The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is inviting the public and other federal agencies to comment on the proposed review of the information currently approved. In accordance with the Paper Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, a notice of information collection is issued... The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), will submit the following information-gathering request to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and authorization under the Paper Reduction Act of 1995. The purpose of this notice is to allow an additional 30 days for ... 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