

The Top 6 Reasons Citizenship Is a Better Option Vs. Renewing Your Green Card

Inevitably, at some point the permanent resident cards ("green cards) of long-time U.S. Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) will expire. LPRs are required to maintain a valid permanent resident card, so green card holders must either continue to renew their LPR status and thus the green card, or apply to "upgrade" their status to U.S. citizen through an application for naturalization.

Opinion: unless there is a strong risk of denial or a risk of loss of green card status or deportation, applying for citizenship via naturalization is always a better option than renewing the green card. Why? Because from a financial perspective, naturalization offers more benefits and provides a better value/better bang for the buck than simply renewing the green card and remaining a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident.

Here are six reasons why.

1. *Naturalization is less expensive over time because there is no need for renewal.* The current fee charged by the government to renew a permanent resident card (green card) is \$450. Now compare that to the current \$680 application fee to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. At first glance it will seem that naturalization is more expensive than renewing the green card. But let's examine this further. Assuming the naturalization application is approved, this becomes a one-time of \$680 fee versus a minimum of \$450 you would have to pay every 10 years to renew your green card. And since immigration filing fees have increased dramatically in recent years, you can expect the cost to renew the green card to increase over time, almost certainly within the 10 year period before a new green card expires. A person may end up paying hefty green card renewal fees 2, 3, 4 or more times over a lifetime. Yikes!

2. *Only Naturalization can protect you from removal (deportation).* Citizenship is the ONLY protection from deportation (removal) from the U.S. The list of criminal offenses - many of them misdemeanors and often involving no jail time - that can trigger removal is continually being expanded by Congress and judicial interpretation. A Legal Permanent Resident (green card holder) will always be subject to the possibility of removal from the U.S. or denied entry upon return to the U.S. for an infraction. As a U.S. citizen, however, the worst punishment one can face is imprisonment (or the death penalty depending on the state), but never deportation.

3. *Naturalization offers increased access to jobs and scholarships.* Eligibility for federal jobs, especially those requiring a security clearance, are restricted to U.S. citizens; certain state law enforcement and other jobs are limited to U.S. citizens as well. Many private higher education scholarships and grants are also reserved for U.S. citizens only.

4. *Your naturalization allows you to sponsor more family members for green cards, and your minor children may automatically become U.S. citizens.* A naturalized U.S. citizen can sponsor more categories of family members for green cards/immigrant visas than a Legal Permanent Resident (green card holder) can, and the wait times are generally much

shorter. An LPR can sponsor a spouse and unmarried children (minors and adults) for green cards. In contrast, a U.S. citizen age 21 or older can sponsor a spouse, minor and adult unmarried children, parents, brothers and sisters (and their children), and adult married sons and daughters (and their children). **Little Known Bonus:** if a parent becomes a naturalized U.S. citizen before the 18th birthday of his or her child who is present in the U.S. in LPR status and in the parent's legal and physical custody, that child automatically becomes a U.S. citizen as a matter of law.

5. *With naturalization, international travel may be easier and you can stay outside the U.S. as long as you want.* A U.S. passport, which you can receive once you become a naturalized citizen, can make international travel easier and eliminate the need for tourist visas to visit many countries. Also, U.S. citizens can remain outside the country for as long as they want and without restriction from the U.S. In comparison, U.S. Legal Permanent Residents must always prove that they continue to be "admissible" to the U.S. when returning from trips abroad and unfortunately can be denied entry even though they have a green card. Furthermore, LPRs always face the risk of losing their status if it has been determined they abandoned their permanent residency by living/working abroad or staying outside the U.S. for too long.

6. *Naturalized citizens can effect real change through enhanced civic participation.* Only U.S. citizens can vote in U.S. federal, state, and local elections, and only U.S. citizens can hold elected office. This is becoming an increasingly important and powerful benefit of naturalization, as state officials, Congress, and the President all influence and help shape future immigration legislation and current enforcement priorities, as well as enact many other laws that affect your finances and quality of life.

WARNING: NOT EVERYONE SHOULD APPLY FOR NATURALIZATION

These are all powerful reasons for every Legal Permanent Resident to at least strongly consider applying for naturalization. However, not everyone should apply, since the applicant must meet certain U.S. residence and good moral character requirements, and in most circumstances, must demonstrate a minimum proficiency in English and pass a civics Test. **Most importantly, when applying for naturalization, you must submit to an FBI fingerprint check and your entire immigration and criminal history is re-opened for review.** The risk of the immigration consequences of prior crimes can be different for Legal Permanent Residents versus naturalization applicants, and unfortunately each year many people apply for naturalization hoping for citizenship yet end up in removal (deportation) proceedings. Also, any prior misrepresentation or fraud in connection with an application for a visa, green card, or other immigration benefit will increase your risk of denial and/or deportation.

CONCLUSION: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

As described above, the benefits of being a naturalized U.S. citizen far outweigh the benefits of remaining a Legal Permanent Resident. Before applying for naturalization, however, you should consult with an experienced immigration attorney to confirm your eligibility for naturalization, and to identify any risks of applying.

To determine whether naturalization is the right option for you at this time, contact The Law Office of Tanya M. Lee, PLLC for a consultation at info@aboutusvisas.com or (480) 559-9529.