




Your Path to Citizenship



Chapter 1: We Help Families of U.S. Citizens Get Green Cards and Citizenship

At Tingen Law, we've dedicated our entire practice to one mission: helping families stay together through family-based and humanitarian immigration. For more than 13 years, we've guided thousands of families through the complex immigration system, always with compassion, professionalism, and a clear focus on results.

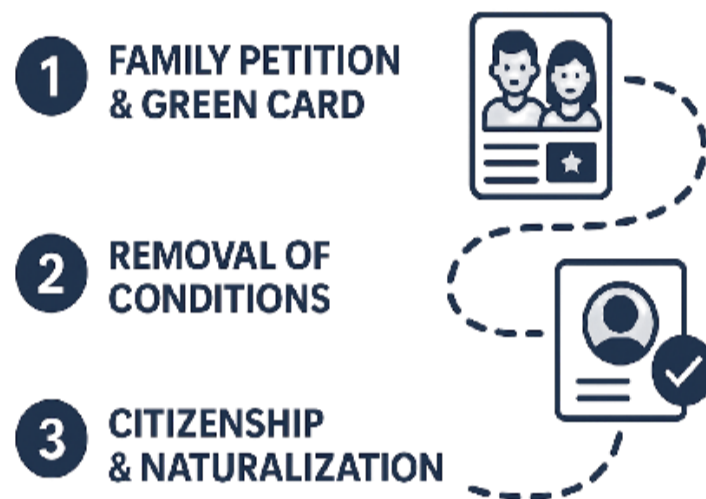
We know this journey isn't easy. Immigration laws are constantly changing, and the process can feel overwhelming. That's why now, more than ever, it's important to have an experienced legal team on your side. When you work with us, you'll know that your case is being handled by attorneys who live



and breathe family-based immigration law every single day.

Whether you're seeking a green card for your spouse, a parent, or a child, or whether you're preparing for the next step toward citizenship, we're here to walk with you each step of the way. Our promise is simple: we'll put our knowledge, experience, and care to work for your family, so you don't have to go through this process alone.

Chapter 2: Your Path to Citizenship



The journey to citizenship usually follows a clear path, even if each family's story is unique. In this chapter, we'll walk through the typical steps starting with a family petition and green card application, moving through the removal of conditions, and finally arriving at citizenship through naturalization. Think of this as your roadmap: simple, straightforward, and designed to help you understand where you are and what comes next.

Family Petition & Green Card Application



FAMILY PETITION & GREEN CARD

Every family-based green card case starts with one key step: filing Form I-130, the Petition for Alien Relative. This is how a U.S. citizen or permanent resident officially tells the government, “This is my family member, and I want them to live here with me.” It’s the foundation of the process, and nothing else moves forward until that petition is filed.

If the immigrant entered the U.S. legally—maybe with a visa or through inspection at the airport or border—they can file the I-130 together with Form I-485, the Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status. This is called “concurrent filing,” and it’s a huge advantage. Instead of waiting months between steps, you can tackle them at the same time and speed things up considerably.

If the immigrant didn't have a lawful entry, or if they're currently living outside the U.S., the process takes a different route. After the I-130 is approved, the case goes through consular processing. That means the immigrant will complete Form DS-260 with the State Department and attend an interview at a U.S. consulate abroad before coming back as a permanent resident.

So at the start, there are really two main tracks: file the I-130 and file the I-485 at the same time if there was a lawful entry, or go through consular processing if there wasn't. Each path has its own quirks, but they each begin the same way—with that family petition.

Forms and Flexibility

Along with the main petitions, there are a few other forms that can make life easier during the process:

- **Form I-765 (Work Authorization):** This allows the immigrant to get a work permit while the green card application is pending. It's a great way to avoid long stretches without the ability to work legally.

- **Form I-131 (Travel Authorization):** Also called “Advance Parole,” this form lets you travel abroad and return while your green card case is still in process. Having this flexibility can be a big relief, especially if you need to visit family outside the U.S.
- **Form I-864 (Affidavit of Support):** Every family-based green card case requires proof that the immigrant will be financially supported. If the sponsoring family member doesn’t meet the income requirements, a joint sponsor can step in using this form to show that the immigrant won’t become a financial burden.

These forms add flexibility and peace of mind, and they’re a normal part of many family-based applications.

Important Notes to Keep in Mind

While most cases follow the steps we just outlined, there are some additional tools that can make a real difference depending on your situation:

- **The 90-Day Rule:** This is a guideline immigration officers use when looking at cases where someone entered on a temporary visa and later applies

for a green card. Used wisely, it can actually work in your favor. If you wait at least 90 days before marrying and filing, officers generally presume you had proper intent when you entered the U.S. Of course, real life doesn't always follow neat timelines—people do sometimes meet and fall in love quickly. The key is that, with a lawyer's guidance, the 90-day rule can give you more options and help avoid unnecessary scrutiny of your case.

- **Waivers (Forms I-601 and I-601A):** Sometimes people worry that past mistakes—like unlawful presence or certain violations—will stop their case cold. Fortunately, that's not always true. Waivers are designed to forgive specific problems so families can still move forward together. With the right waiver, many hurdles can be overcome, even if you have lived in the U.S. for some time without lawful presence.
- **Military Parole in Place:** If your U.S. citizen family member has served in the military, you may qualify for something called parole in place. This is a powerful option that can "fix" an unlawful entry and allow you to apply for a green card without leav-

ing the country. It's one of the ways the law recognizes and supports military families.

- **VAWA and U Visa Options:** Nobody should feel trapped or unsafe. If you've experienced abuse from a U.S. citizen spouse or have been the victim of a crime and cooperated with law enforcement, there are special options for you. VAWA allows abused spouses, children, and parents to self-petition for a green card independently, while the U visa provides protection and a pathway to residency for victims of crime. These aren't the typical routes, but they exist to protect vulnerable people and keep families safe.

Removal of Conditions

2

REMOVAL
OF
CONDITION



When you first get a marriage-based green card, it's usually valid for only two years. That's because the government wants to make sure the marriage is genuine before granting permanent residency. To move from a "conditional" green card to a full 10-year card, you have to file Form I-751, known as the Petition to Remove Conditions.

If you're still married and both of you are on the same page, the process is pretty straightforward. You and your spouse file the I-751 together during the 90-day window before the conditional green card expires. With enough evidence of your ongoing marriage—things like joint taxes, shared leases, and family photos—the petition usually goes through smoothly.

If the marriage has ended, things get more complicated, but there are still options. You can file the I-751 on your own with what's called a waiver. Waivers are available if the marriage ended in divorce, if there was abuse in the relationship, or if removing conditions on your own would cause extreme hardship. Unlike joint filings, there's no strict 90-day deadline for waiver cases—you can still file the I-751 after the expiration of your conditional residence.

In short, the removal of conditions step is all about proving that your marriage was real. For couples still together, it's a routine step. For those who aren't, it requires more care and evidence, but it's absolutely possible to succeed.

Citizenship & Naturalization

3

CITIZENSHIP
& NATURALIZATION



For many families, this is the step they've been waiting for—the moment when a green card holder can finally become a U.S. citizen. Citizenship through naturalization is the last stop on the journey, and it comes with rights and benefits that permanent residency just can't match, like the ability to vote and hold a U.S. passport.

If you received your green card through marriage to a U.S. citizen, you can usually apply for naturalization after just three years of being a permanent resident, as long as you're still married and living together. For most other green card holders, the timeline is five years. Either way, naturalization is the final step that secures your place in the U.S. permanently. The process begins with filing Form N-400, the Application for Naturalization. You'll submit supporting documents, attend a biometrics appointment, and

later have an interview where you'll demonstrate your English and civics knowledge. Once approved, you'll take the Oath of Allegiance in a ceremony that marks the official start of your life as a U.S. citizen. This step is more than paperwork—it's a milestone. It represents stability, opportunity, and a lasting connection to your new home.

Asides to Keep in Mind

- **Filing Citizenship While Removal of Conditions Is Pending:** Many people don't realize you can actually apply for naturalization even if your I-751 petition is still pending. USCIS will review both applications together. This can save time and keep your case moving forward, especially if you're otherwise eligible for citizenship.
- **Dual Citizenship Concerns:** Some clients worry about whether they have to give up their original citizenship when they naturalize. The answer depends on the laws of your home country. The U.S. generally allows dual citizenship, but not every country does. It's worth checking the rules for your country of origin so you can make an informed decision before you take the oath.




Chapter 3: You Can Trust Tingen Law

When you choose Tingen Law, you're choosing a firm that focuses exclusively on family and humanitarian immigration. That focus means we know the law inside and out. This is what we do every single day, and it's why so many families put their trust in us.

You can find us online at <https://tingen.law>, fill out the form on our "Hire Us" page, or just give us a call at (804) 477-1720.

The initial consultation with a member of our intake team is free, and it's a great way to get answers and see how we can help.



Access Plus: Extra Support When You Need It

Many of our clients tell us they'd like more regular contact while their case is pending. The reality is that immigration cases often take months or even years, and there aren't always new updates to share. That's why we created Immigration Access+, a subscription program that offers ongoing support and extra peace of mind.

For just \$47 a month, Access+ gives you:

- **Monthly Check-Ins:** A chance to meet with one of our supervised paralegals to review your case and answer questions.
- **Complete Legal Organization:** We'll collect, digitize, and organize your most important immigration documents in a shared Google Drive.
- **Emergency Protection:** Includes an annual legal power of attorney, so you're prepared if unexpected issues arise.
- **Clear Legal Education:** Access to attorney-led explainer videos and downloadable guides that break down complex immigration topics into easy-to-understand steps.

A close-up photograph of a family of three—a man, a woman, and a child—hugging and smiling warmly. The man is on the left, the woman is on the right, and the child is in the middle. They are all looking down and smiling. The background is dark and out of focus. There are decorative geometric shapes in the corners: a blue hexagon in the top left, a yellow hexagon in the top left, and a blue hexagon in the bottom right, with a yellow hexagon in the bottom right.

Take the First Step Today

Your journey to citizenship doesn't have to feel overwhelming—you don't have to go through it alone.

At Tingen Law, we've helped thousands of families take the same path you're on now, and we'd be honored to help yours too.

[Schedule Your Free Consultation](#)