



The Green Card Road Map

An Immigration Attorney's Guide to Keeping Your Family Together

A Quick Note

The information in this ebook is promotional material intended to provide examples of the kind of work we do, why we do it, and why you can trust us.

One of the ways that we like to show you that you can trust us is by complying with legal and ethical rules.

Those rules require we give you the following all-caps disclaimer:

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: CASE RESULTS DEPEND UPON A VARIETY OF FACTORS UNIQUE TO EACH CASE. CASE RESULTS DO NOT GUARANTEE OR PREDICT A SIMILAR RESULT IN ANY FUTURE CASE.

This is true of our firm, and of any other firm.

As you seek out legal counsel in your case we encourage you to seek out lawyers and law firms that abide by the highest ethical standards. We wish you the best of luck with your case. 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hinger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.



Chapter 1: From 0 to 200 Cases in less than a week

I started this firm in November of 2012.

If you remember what the world looked like back then, the economy for graduating lawyers was... well, let's just say it was less than optimistic.

I had recently graduated from the University of Richmond School of Law, passed the Virginia Bar, and I was hungry for work. But after a job search that turned out to be pretty fruitless, I realized I had two

choices: I could keep waiting for someone to give me a chance, or I could hang my own shingle and take a chance on myself.

So I decided to start my own practice.

To get things moving, I called a friend of mine who headed a pro bono immigration legal clinic. I left a voicemail—just a quick note saying I wanted to take on a case or two to get my name out in the community.

It didn't take him long to call me back.

"Jacob," he said, "You asked if you could take a couple of cases. How would you like to take on a couple hundred?"

He was switching firms and couldn't take his pro bono caseload with him. He needed someone he could trust to step in immediately.

I went from zero clients to nearly 200 in about a week.

The Trial by Fire

Going from zero to 200 is as daunting as it sounds. Most of these clients had been promised free representation, so that first year was a tricky balancing act: I was helping as many people as I could for free while trying to figure out how to actually make a living and grow a practice.

That “trial by fire” changed who I am. It changed how I practice law.

In those early days, I was in the trenches. I was handling removal defense, humanitarian cases, and everything in between. I saw firsthand what happens when people get lost in the shuffle of government paperwork. I saw the lack of caring that the system shows toward human lives—like the time an ICE officer said a child wasn’t in a detention facility because they “called the name and nobody answered,” forgetting that the child in question was only two-years old.

Those experiences taught me that immigration

isn't just about forms; it's about survival. It's about the tired and poor that the Statue of Liberty talks about—people who aren't trying to violate our laws, but are simply trying to breathe free.

The Evolution of the Mission

As the years went by, my firm grew. I started hiring more attorneys and staff. Along the way I dabbled and learned. I taught a course at the University of Richmond School of Law about Immigrant Rights. I did business visas. At one point I even successfully registered and owned an EB-5 regional center.

But more recently, I've had a realization.

While I can do international mergers or eb-5 million-aire visas, that's not where the heart of this firm lies. My team and I realized that our greatest impact—the place where we can provide the most value and create the best results—is in keeping families together.

I've seen how much stress a conditional green card or a pending naturalization can put on a marriage.

I've seen the fear in a US citizen's eyes when they realize their spouse might have to go through a complex waiver process just to stay together.

That's why we created this Road Map.

We've moved away from trying to be everything to everyone. We still continue to represent clients in immigration court—practicing there gives us needed context in the current political environment.

But nationally, we've narrowed our lens to focus solely on family-based green cards, and the services that follow-on from that process—like I-751 Removal of Conditions, and N-400 Citizenship applications. By focusing on these specific paths, we aren't just form-fillers. We are partners in your family's security.

Let's look at the road ahead.



Chapter 2: The Peace of Mind Partner

When people think about immigration law, they usually think about paperwork. They think about thick stacks of government forms, filing fees, and long waits. If you're looking for a green card for your spouse or parent, you might even think you're just looking for someone to fill out the application for you.

But let's be real: If immigration were just about filling

out forms, you wouldn't need an attorney.

The truth is, when you hire our firm for a family-based immigration case, you aren't buying paperwork.

You are buying the ability to sit across the dinner table from your spouse or parent without that low-level hum of anxiety in the back of your mind—the fear that one mistake, one missed deadline, or one misinterpreted rule could change your family's life forever.

The Experience Advantage

Last chapter, I shared how my early years in the trenches of removal defense shaped the DNA of this firm.

Locally, we continue to fight the good fight. As we interact with government attorneys in immigration court on a daily basis, we stay up-to-date on developments in immigration law that worry a lot of families.

Nationally, we are laser focused on family-based green cards. Even though we're in Richmond, VA, we've represented clients in places like New York, Texas, California, and even Alaska!

This combination of court experience and national experience gives us a unique and highly-focused perspective on how best to help our clients. Think about it this way: If the lights in your house start flickering and your outlets are sparking, you call an electrician. When he arrives, he might find a loose wire and fix the problem in ten minutes. Do you pay him ten dollars for ten minutes of his time? Of course not. You're paying for the fact that he knew exactly which wire was the fire hazard and had the experience to ensure your house doesn't burn down while you sleep.

Immigration is no different.

Because we've narrowed our national focus strictly to family-based green cards, I-751s, and N-400s, we aren't re-learning the law on your dime. We've seen the patterns. We know the red flags that trigger problems in the immigration process. While I-601A

waivers are administrative filings and not decided in a courtroom, our deep background in litigation gives us a unique advantage. We know exactly what the government looks for when they try to tear families apart in court, which means we know how to build an administrative case that is legally strong from the start.

Moving from Point A to Point B

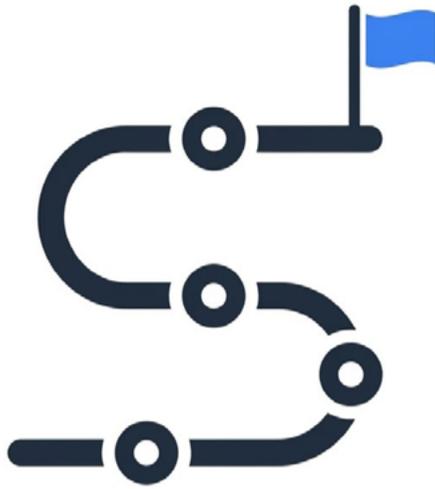
In our firm, we look at every case as a journey from Point A to Point B.

- **Point A** is where you are now: Navigating a system that often feels uncaring about your family's future, worrying about public charge rules, or wondering if your Military Parole-in-Place application will actually be approved.
- **Point B** is the goal: Permanent residency. Citizenship. The "Golden Door."

Our job isn't to sell you hours of our time. Our job is to be the partner who walks you from Point A to Point B with the fewest obstacles possible.

When you work with Tingen Law, you're getting an experienced team that knows how to solve the problem because we've successfully navigated these paths thousands of times before.

In the next chapter, we're going to look at the specific road map for the family-based green card—and why the details you don't see are often the ones that matter most.



Chapter 3: The Green Card Road Map

If you're reading this, you're likely at the beginning of a journey. You've realized that the "Golden Door" of the United States is within reach for your family, but you've also realized that the path is anything but a straight line.

In our firm, we call this the Green Card Road Map. It's the process of moving from being a "huddled

mass yearning to breathe free” to having a permanent seat at the table. While every case has its own unique terrain, most family-based journeys follow a predictable set of milestones.

Here is what that road looks like.

Milestone 1: The Foundation (The I-130)

Everything starts with the I-130, the Petition for Alien Relative. This is where a U.S. citizen or Legal Permanent Resident tells the government: *“This person is my family, and I want them here.”*

On the surface, it’s a simple form. But as we discussed in the last chapter, the details you don’t see are the ones that matter. We don’t just fill out the I-130; we build a narrative. We look for the gaps in documentation that might cause a USCIS officer to second-guess the validity of your marriage or relationship. Our goal is to make the case so clear that the government has no reason to slow you down.

Milestone 2: Choosing Your Path (I-485 vs. Consular Processing)

Once the foundation is laid, we have to decide how you will actually receive your Green Card. This depends largely on where you are currently located.

- **Adjustment of Status (I-485):** If you are already in the U.S., we often file the I-485 alongside the I-130. This concurrent filing is a major milestone because it often allows you to apply for work authorization and travel documents while you wait for the final decision.
- **Consular Processing (DS-260):** If you are outside the U.S., or if you are present in the U.S. without a lawful entry, your path goes through the Department of State and a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad.

Both paths have their own set of traps. We help you choose the path that offers your family the most security and the least amount of time apart.

Milestone 3: Navigating Roadblocks

At some point on this road, the government might issue a Request for Evidence (RFE). For many people, this is a moment of panic. They see it as a sign that their case is failing.

We see it differently.

In our firm, an RFE is often just a routine part of the dialogue with USCIS. Because we focus exclusively on these cases, we've seen every type of RFE the government can throw at a family. When an RFE arrives, we don't scramble; we execute. We know exactly what evidence they are looking for and how to present it so that your case stays on the fast track to Point B.

Milestone 4: The Deep Work: Waivers and Military Parole-in-Place

Sometimes the road has a significant obstacle—perhaps an entry issue or a prior status problem. This is one area where our litigation background becomes your greatest asset.

Whether it's a Military Parole-in-Place (PIP) for family members of our service members or an I-601A Provisional Waiver, this is deep legal work.

While these specific waivers are decided in an administrative office and not a courtroom, we bring a courtroom-tested rigor to the process. We've spent 14 years in the immigration courts fighting asylums and cancellations of removal—environments where the government's sole job is to tear family stories apart.

We take the lessons learned from those high-stakes battles and apply them to your petition, ensuring your case is built to withstand that same level of scrutiny before it's even filed.

Milestone 5: The Interview and Beyond

The final milestone is often the interview at a USCIS office or a U.S. consulate. This is the moment where the years of preparation come to a head.

Our job is to ensure that when you walk into that room, you aren't just prepared—you're confident. You aren't worried about whether the forms were filled out correctly; you're focused on your family's future.

But the road doesn't always end with the green card. As your life progresses, we are there for your next applications too, whether that's filing an I-751 Removal of Conditions application, or an N-400 Application for Naturalization.

Why We Walk This Road Together

The U.S. immigration system isn't designed to be user-friendly. It's a massive machine that can be indifferent to the families it processes.

We decided to focus our firm on family-based immigration because we believe your family deserves better. You deserve a partner who knows the road, knows where the hidden hazards are, and knows how to get you from Point A to Point B as smoothly as possible.



Chapter 4: Why Cheap is Often Expensive

In the world of immigration, there is a dangerous trap that many families fall into. It's called the commodity trap.

When you treat your family's immigration status like a commodity—like a gallon of milk or a tank of gas—you start shopping for the lowest price. You call five different law firms and ask, "How much do you charge for a green card?" If one firm says \$5,000

and another says \$1,500, the choice seems obvious, right?

But here is the problem: In a family-based immigration case, cheap is often the most expensive path you can take.

The Surface-Level Trap: When Forms Aren't Enough

Many people hire an immigration attorney who claims to do it all, only to find out they've hired a form-filler rather than an advocate.

A few years ago, a family came to us in a desperate situation. Ten years earlier, they had hired an attorney to handle an I-601 waiver. When we reviewed the file, we were stunned. The previous lawyer had compiled a list of exhibits, but they hadn't written a single page of legal argument to support the case. Worse, because that lawyer didn't take the time to truly interview the client and understand their history, they proposed a course of action that triggered the permanent bar under INA 212(a)(9)(C).

Because of that mistake, the U.S. citizen spouse had to live in Mexico with her husband for a decade, facing real threats from cartels, all while their family suffered.

It took us ten years and a complex I-212 permission to reapply to fix that mess and finally bring them home. That family didn't save money by hiring an "affordable" attorney who did surface-level work; they lost ten years of their lives.

The DIY Trap: The Cost of Saving Money

Then there is the DIY trap, where families try to navigate the Road Map themselves to avoid legal fees.

We once had a client who hired us for an I-130 petition. After it was approved, they decided to save money by filing the next step—the I-485 adjustment of status—on their own. It was denied. They came back to us, and we re-explained the path they actually needed: consular processing.

But again, they tried to do it themselves. They were just days away from leaving for their interview in a foreign country when they called us. We realized they hadn't filed the necessary I-601A waiver. If they had gone to that interview, they would have been stuck outside the U.S. for years. We were able to stop the process just in time to file the waiver correctly, but the stress and the lost filing fees from their failed DIY attempts far outweighed the "savings" they were looking for.

The Electrician's Logic: Experience over Hours

Remember the electrician analogy? You don't pay an electrician for the ten minutes it takes him to flip a switch; you pay him for the 14 years he spent learning which switch prevents the fire.

When you hire a firm that's laser-focused like ours, you aren't paying for hours. You are paying for the fact that we've seen the government try to tear family stories apart, and we know exactly how to build a case that is designed to stay on track. We know how to draft the legal arguments that are often

overlooked and how to catch the entry issues that DIY applicants miss.

Investment vs. Expense

We want you to think about your legal fee not as an expense, but as an investment.

An *expense* is something that drains your bank account and gives you a temporary service.

An *investment* is something that secures your family's multi-generational future. When you hire a partner who walks you from Point A to Point B with confidence, you are investing in:

1. Safety for your family
2. Stability for your Home
3. The end of the low-level hum of immigration anxiety.

In my 14 years of practice, I have never had a client regret investing in the security of their family. But I have met countless people who regretted trying to save a few dollars, only to end up in our office asking

us to fix a decade-long disaster.

Don't treat your family's future like a bargain bin item. Choose the path of value. Choose the path of experience.

In our final chapter, we'll talk about what it means to actually have a trusted partner and how to take that final step through the Golden Door.



Chapter 5: Your Trusted Partner

We've reached the end of the map.

If you've read this far, I hope you have a much clearer picture of why the U.S. immigration system feels so daunting. It isn't just the forms; it's the lack of a clear path and the fear of an indifferent system.

When I started this firm in 2012 with those first 200 cases, my mission was Access to Justice. Back then,

that meant taking on every fight, in every courtroom, for anyone who needed it. But as I look at where we are today, I've realized that the ultimate form of access to justice is providing you with a focused team that handles the heavy lifting of the national immigration machine, so you can focus on what actually matters: your life with your family.

Sitting on the Same Side of the Table

In the traditional law firm model, the lawyer is often a distant figure behind a desk. You pay for their time, you wait for their calls, and you hope they're as invested in your case as you are.

We do things differently.

Because we've narrowed our firm's focus to family reunification, we don't see you as just another file in a cabinet. We see ourselves sitting on the same side of the table with you. When you hire us, you aren't just getting a lawyer—you are gaining a partner.

Even though we operate on a national scale and we

may never meet in person at a physical office, our technology and our tailored process are designed to make you feel like we are right there in the room with you. You get the benefit of our combined decades of immigration litigation experience and thousands of successful outcomes, all directed toward one goal: getting you from Point A to Point B.

The “Aha” Moment

There is a moment in almost every case I handle—it usually happens right after our first deep strategy session. I can see the tension leave a client’s shoulders. They realize they don’t have to stay up until 2:00 AM scrolling through conflicting advice on social media. They realize they have an experienced team that has already seen their specific problem—whether it’s a permanent bar issue or a complex Military PIP—and solved it.

That “aha” moment is what I strive for. It’s the realization that you have finally found the experienced attorney who knows exactly how to solve your problem.

Why I Share This Road Map

People often ask why we do this. Why help the people we help? Why publish hundreds of immigration information articles on our website? Why make this guide?

It goes back to that first voicemail I left in 2012.

I believe that an informed immigrant is an empowered immigrant. Whether you choose to hire me or not, I want you to understand the stakes. I want you to know that your family's future is too valuable to be treated like a DIY project or a cheap commodity.

I share this because I've seen what happens when families don't have a map. I've seen the ten-year exile, the cartel threats, and the lost savings. If this guide prevents even one family from falling into the commodity trap, then it has served its purpose.

Your Seat at the Golden Door

The Statue of Liberty still stands for a nation of immigrants, and I still believe in the promise of the Golden Door. But today, in 2026 and beyond, the lock on that door is more complex than ever.

You don't have to pick that lock alone.

If you are ready to move from the anxiety of Point A to the security of Point B, I am ready to lead the way. I've spent 14 years in the trenches so that your journey can be one of confidence, not fear.

The road is open. *Let's walk it together.*

Next Steps

Thank you for reading this guide. I hope it has given you the right introduction to Tingen Law. We look forward to getting to know you better as well.

If you're curious about next steps, let's get started:

- 1. Check Your Eligibility:** First, visit [our website](#) and take our quick eligibility quiz to find out which immigration path is right for your family
- 2. Schedule a Strategy Session:** Once you have your results, let's identify your specific path and build a legally strong plan.
- 3. Follow us on Social Media:** Check us out on all the social platforms. Watch interviews with clients on our YouTube channel. Listen to our podcast, Nation of Immigrants.

Talk soon,
Jacob Tingen
Managing Partner
Tingen Law, PLLC

[Check Your Eligibility](#)