



## THE AMERICAN LEGION LEGISLATIVE POINT PAPERS

### **Citizenship for Honorable Service**

#### **Background**

Immigrants have always made up a portion of the U.S. Armed Forces, and service in the military has been one way to become a U.S. citizen. Military service has provided a pathway to American citizenship for more than 760,000 immigrant servicemembers. In 2021, more than 8,000 servicemembers with permanent resident cards became American citizens; however, obtaining citizenship is not automatic and requires a servicemember to begin the process upon initial entry into the military. Eligible veterans who do not complete the process are discharged with their resident alien status intact and remain non-U.S. citizens.

Over the last few years, various reports from citizenship organizations, national and local news sources, and firsthand accounts from Members of Congress have confirmed the deportation of hundreds or thousands of veterans. Many veterans have stated they believe their service automatically awarded citizenship. Furthermore, many believe the military did not do enough to inform its non-citizen immigrant members that they qualified for an expedited citizenship process. The servicemember is typically left to pursue citizenship with little assistance or guidance. Recent Defense Department policy changes make it challenging to get their naturalization paperwork in order.

The American Legion believes all non-citizen immigrants veterans should be afforded every opportunity to complete the process toward citizenship before exiting the military. Post-service opportunities should also be bolstered, both for the veteran and eligible family members.

#### **Key Points**

- Dating back to 1775, countless immigrants have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services teams at military training installations were removed in order to prevent military members from being naturalized upon graduating from basic training.
- Veterans have been deported after serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, for committing non-violent crimes.
- Deported veterans lack full access to VA benefits.

#### **What Can Congress Do?**

- Implement measures within the DoD to ensure the process of naturalization through honorable military service is completed before discharge (the *Naturalization at Training Sites Act*).



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- Pass legislation that would provide protection for non-citizen veterans and their families from deportation (H.R.1182/S.3212, *Veteran Deportation Prevention and Reform Act*).
- Require DoD and the Department of Homeland Security to report to Congress annually the number of non-citizens serving at that time in the U.S. Armed Forces, the numbers of naturalization applications filed by servicemembers, the results of those applications, and the number of veterans deported.

### Relevant Resolutions:

- Resolution No. 10 (2018): Expedited Citizenship Applications for Deported Veterans<sup>19</sup>
- Resolution No. 15 (2018): Expedited Citizenship Through Military Service<sup>20</sup>
- Resolution No. 19 (2021): Oppose Deportation of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans<sup>21</sup>
- Resolution No. 20 (2021): Oppose Deportation of Immediate Family Members of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 10 (2018): [\*Expedited Citizenship Applications for Deported Veterans\*](#).

<sup>20</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 15 (2018): [\*Expedited Citizenship Through Military Service\*](#).

<sup>21</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 19 (2021): [\*Oppose Deportation of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans\*](#).

<sup>22</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 20 (2021): [\*Oppose Deportation of Immediate Family Members of Non-Citizen Immigrant Veterans\*](#).