

Info for Adoptive Families and Adoptees on Proof of Identity, Proof of Citizenship, and More

Prepared by Maureen McCauley January 2026

Disclaimer: This is for informational purposes only; it's a guideline meant to be helpful. I have drawn this information primarily from government sources, such as the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, Social Security Administration, etc. I am not a lawyer or expert. Always consult with attorneys and other experts.

U.S. Government Proof of Identity and/or Citizenship

What U.S. government issued documents are Proof of *Identity*?

- Driver's License
- State-issued ID
- Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)
- Social Security card
- Real ID

Note: These may be considered primary or secondary forms of identity. Best proofs of identity have a photo.

What U.S. government issued documents are Proof of *Citizenship*?

- Certificate of Citizenship
- Passport
- Passport Card
- Certificate of Naturalization
- Birth Certificate showing birth in U.S.

Note: Best proofs of citizenship have a photo.

What U.S. government issued documents are Proof of Identity AND of Citizenship?

- Certificate of Citizenship
- Passport
- Passport Card
- Enhanced Driver's License (issued in 5 states)
- Birth Certificate for U.S. birth

Note: Best proofs have a photo.

Does Real ID prove citizenship?

A standard REAL ID proves lawful presence in the U.S., which can include non-citizens (like green card holders or visa holders). It does **not** verify full citizenship.

Enhanced Driver's License (EDL)/ID: This special state-issued ID and driver's license proves citizenship. Its primary use can be land/sea border crossings between the US and Canada. Five states (bordering Canada) currently offer it: MI, MN, NY, VT, and WA.

Are there government-issued documents that are not proof of citizenship?

Yes. Here are 3 examples:

A Social Security card is not proof of citizenship: lawfully admitted non-citizens can get a Social Security card. Also, there is no tie-in to federal databases. For example, the Social Security

Administration is not tied into the database of the Department of State or Homeland Security. Adoptive parents and adult adoptees should check with the Social Security Administration(SSA) to be sure adoptees are identified as citizens by SSA.

A voter registration card is not proof of citizenship. While non-citizens are not allowed to vote, most states allow people to register to vote by swearing or affirming under penalty of perjury that they are citizens. Many states are considering legislation to require proof of citizenship before allowing folks to register to vote.

Military IDs are not proof of citizenship. Legal residents (green card holders; non-full citizens) can serve in the military.

Adoptees and Temporary Protected Status

What is Temporary Protected Status (TPS)?

TPS allows foreign nationals from certain

countries to live and work legally in the United States for a temporary period when conditions at home (like war, natural disaster, or other emergencies) make it unsafe to return.

It can allow folks to work legally in the U.S., and can protect them from deportation. It is not a path to a green card or citizenship. TPS can be ended when the U.S. determines their country is safe to return to.

Can Adoptees Qualify for TPS?

Maybe. It's complicated. And unusual.

- Adoptees from TPS countries do not automatically have TPS status.
- Being from a TPS-designated country does not mean a person has Temporary Protected Status.
- About 5,000 Ethiopians currently have TPS in the US.

TPS Ends for Ethiopians February 13, 2026.

What does that mean for Ethiopian adoptees?

Nothing legally, if they are U.S. citizens.

However, adoptees could get caught up in sweeps, or challenged as to their citizenship.

How to Carry/Show Proof of Citizenship?

- Photocopy the best proof of citizenship you have, such as the Certificate of Citizenship or a passport card, in a size that can be slipped into a wallet or between the phone and its case. *The documents may say not to photocopy them. I'd override that.*
- This is useful for folks who lose things. It beats worrying that the actual passport card or other original documents could be lost.
- It also means that the child/teen/adult doesn't have to open their phone to show a photo on their phone.

Phone Suggestions: You decide what's right for you.

Learn how to prevent your phone from being accessed by others. Google info for your type of phone.

Examples:

- Disable biometric unlocking.
- Encrypt your device.
- Power off the phone completely to put it in a "Before First Unlock" (BFU) state, which is the most secure and makes data extraction extremely difficult.
- Make sure phone apps create security for you. For example, some apps leave phones on automatically when you're home or when they're

on your person: that could create a vulnerable situation.

Other Suggestions

- Make a wallet- or phone case-sized list of important phone numbers.
- Keep original documents in a safe space.
- Make copies of government documents and share them with trusted folks (lawyers, grandparents, etc.). *The documents may say not to photocopy them. I'd override that.*

Also....

- Stay in community.
- Stay informed.
- Breathe deeply and slowly. Share de-stressing suggestions with others.
- Find joy. Seriously.

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