

THE NEED: LIBERIAN IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION



LEGISLATION FOR PERMANENT STATUS FOR LIBERIANS.

S. 656, the **Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act**, and its companion, H.R. 1293, the **Liberian Refugee Immigration Protection Act**, would permit eligible Liberians to apply for lawful permanent resident status in the U.S.

TPS and DED do not lead to lawful permanent resident status – no matter how long the “temporary” status lasts. A special act of Congress is required for people on TPS or DED to apply to become lawful permanent residents. Without legislation, Liberians who have been lawfully living in the U.S. for nearly two decades on temporary protected status (TPS) or deferred enforced departure (DED) will be forced to leave their homes and families in the U.S. and return to Liberia. Such legislation is not unusual – Congress has passed such legislation allowing certain Chinese, Haitian, Polish, Ugandan, Afghani, and Ethiopian nationals to apply for permanent resident status.

THE PRECARIOUS STATUS OF LIBERIANS IN THE UNITED STATES.

The U.S. first extended temporary protected status (TPS) to Liberians in 1991. Every year, Liberians have re-registered and paid filing fees to renew their status and work permission. Today fewer than 3,600 Liberians lawfully reside in the United States under temporary protection known as deferred enforced departure (DED). Despite nearly two decades of lawful residence in the U.S., when DED ends on September 30, 2011, permission to remain and work in the United States ends.

A BRUTAL CONFLICT.

During the brutal Liberian civil wars, fighters committed wide-scale violations of international humanitarian and human rights law including **massacres, rape, torture, summary executions, and collective punishments.** Fighting factions made **widespread use of child soldiers.** Studies have found that **up to 90% of women suffered at least one act of sexual violence** during the war. Fighting factions attacked civilian populations, medical personnel, humanitarian workers, and peacekeepers. They also targeted refugee populations in cross-border raids on neighboring countries. Out of a pre-war population of three million, an estimated 250,000 people were killed, with as many as 1.5 million displaced during the conflict in Liberia.

A FRAGILE PEACE.

Liberia’s economy, infrastructure, and social services remain devastated by civil conflict. Illiteracy is estimated to be between 70 and 80 percent in Liberia. Schools buildings are devastated and overcrowded and many students are taught by unqualified teachers. The majority of the population still lives without clean drinking water, access to health care, or electricity. Security is a growing concern, and the crime rate is exacerbated by high unemployment.

A HIGH COST TO U.S. COMMUNITIES.

Liberians hold jobs, pay taxes, pay rent, own houses, and run businesses. As native English-speakers, they have moved readily into U.S. society. They serve as pastors, teachers, and health-care professionals. Many have children who were born in this country—these children are U.S. citizens, many of whom have never even visited Liberia. Cities with large Liberian populations are concerned about the impact mass deportations of Liberians will have on their communities including increased home foreclosures when Liberian home-owners are deported, disruptions in the workforce in the Liberian-dominated health care industry, and the break-up of families as U.S. citizen children are left behind by deported parents.

AN HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP.

The United States has a special historical relationship with Liberians. In 1822, a group of former slaves from the United States arrived at what was to become Liberia's capital city, Monrovia—named after U.S. President James Monroe, and Americo-Liberians governed the country for years. The constitution and government of Liberia closely models that of the United States. The national language of Liberia is English. Liberia long has been a strategic and military ally to the United States. During World War II Liberia provided access to rubber and served as a troop transit point for American forces.

THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

After 20 years of “temporary” protection, Liberians have established stable and secure homes in the United States without being given the opportunity to become permanent residents. They should not be forced to abandon their families and the lives they have built or be forced to return to a country struggling to recover from the devastation of war. Liberians have been productive members of our communities for years, establishing careers, homes, and families while following our immigration laws. **After 20 years, special legislation to give Liberians the opportunity to apply for permanent resident status is the right thing to do.**

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEED FOR LIBERIAN IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION.

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