



## Tip of the Month March 2020

### No More Living in Limbo: The Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act (LRIFA)

Submitted by: Colleen Beebe Purisaca,  
VLN Immigrant Legal Services Program Manager/Attorney

In response to years of advocacy, on December 20, 2019, the president signed the Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act (section 7611) (LRIFA). The LRIFA provides a way for thousands of Liberians nationwide to obtain a permanent legal status in the United States. Minnesota's Liberian community – the largest in the United States, numbering about 30,000 – includes many people who may not have a permanent legal status in the United States and will be seeking legal help to apply for adjustment of status.

**Why is this important?** Apart from the historic ties Liberians have with the United States, there are thousands of Liberians in the United States who have been living in limbo – some for decades – with temporary legal statuses (TPS and DED), old or pending asylum claims, expired visitor visas, and some with final orders of removal. These individuals have strong ties to local communities, contribute to and are often the backbone of certain industries, and have raised their families in the United States. The law recognizes the public and humanitarian benefit to the United States that will result by providing Liberians in these limbo-like statuses a pathway to permanent residence and U.S. citizenship.

**Who is eligible?** This law allows Liberian nationals who have been continuously physically present in the United States since November 20, 2014, and are otherwise eligible, to apply for lawful permanent residence in the United States (e.g. obtain a green card). Spouses and unmarried children of any age of an eligible Liberian national are also eligible to adjust their status to permanent residence no matter their country of origin or their date of entry to the United States.

**Who is not eligible?** Not everyone will be eligible, thus the importance of early screening to ensure potential applicants understand the eligibility requirements, remedy disqualifying issues, where possible, to be able to file on time, or refrain from filing. Those who are not eligible include persons:

- Convicted of crimes considered an “aggravated felony” under immigration law;
- Convicted of two or more crimes involving “moral turpitude;”
- Who have ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion; and, those
- Who fall into a category of no admissibility to the United States and are not eligible for a waiver or other form of relief.

The window is short to apply – one year from the LRIFA's enactment. Persons should get screened immediately by a competent immigration lawyer to determine if they qualify and how to apply. Immigration cases can be complicated, and applications must be “properly filed” by the deadline,

December 20, 2020. As mentioned above, there are also reasons why a person may not be eligible and should not file an application.

“This is a one-time opportunity for Liberians who have been living in limbo in the United States, some for decades, and their family members. People should get help right away to see if they qualify and not wait. There may be matters persons need to address prior to filing that will take time. The deadline is firm,” states David Kubat, a volunteer attorney with VLN’s special LRIFA Pro Se Project whose law firm is a founding partner of VLN’s Brooklyn Legal Clinic. “If you don’t properly file the application by December 20, 2020, you’ll likely miss out on this opportunity and may not have other options to apply for a permanent status in the United States later.”

Once the LRIFA application is filed, the applicant will be able to apply for employment authorization. For Liberians with employment authorization under Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) that expires on March 30, 2020, it will be particularly important to file soon to avoid any gaps in employment authorization.

Volunteer Lawyers Network is expanding its monthly legal clinic services held in partnership with the West African Family and Community Services, held on the first Friday of every month, to provide special LRIFA legal screening, advice and referral, and help to review pro se applications. The legal clinic is hosted at Brooklyn United Methodist Church, 7200 Brooklyn Boulevard in Brooklyn Center. Persons should call VLN at (612) 752-6635 to see if they qualify for VLN’s services and to schedule an appointment.

VLN will also place full representation LRIFA cases with pro bono counsel.

If you would like to volunteer for this special project, contact [Colleen Beebe Purisaca](#) at (612) 752-6670.