

How to Get Your Birth Certificate for Immigration

For green card, immigrant visa, and family petition cases · By Attorney Joseph F. Botelho

WHY THIS MATTERS

Immigration uses your birth certificate to confirm **who you are**, **where you were born**, and **who your parents are**. A real certificate can still be the **wrong version** and lead to a request for evidence. A U.S. citizen petitioning for a parent or a brother or sister uses their **own** birth certificate to prove the relationship.

HAVE THESE READY

- ☐ Full name at birth (and any later names)
- ☐ Exact date and place of birth (city, county, state or country)
- ☐ Both parents' full names, including birth surnames
- ☐ Photo ID for ordering a U.S. copy
- ☐ Where the birth was registered (civil registry, town, county, or state)
- ☐ Money for fees, and time: foreign records can take months
- ☐ A certified translator for any document not in English

GET THE RIGHT CERTIFICATE

- 1 Born in the U.S.?** Order a **full certified copy** from the state vital records office or the city/town or county clerk. Find any state at CDC "Where to Write for Vital Records."
- 2 Massachusetts:** State Registry (RVRS) \$20 in person, \$32 by mail, \$42 expedited mail; \$54 first copy online through **VitalChek**, the official vendor.
- 3 Born abroad?** Go to travel.state.gov → Reciprocity and Civil Documents by Country → your country → Birth Certificates. Order exactly the document and office listed.
- 4 Check it** against the 6 items on page 2 before you file.
- 5 Translate** the whole document into English with the translator's signed statement of accuracy and competence.
- 6 Keep the original.** NVC applicants bring originals to the interview; USCIS may ask to see them.

WHICH VERSION GETS ACCEPTED?

Full certified copy (often called long form)	Both parents listed, registrar signature, seal or stamp	Usually what you want
Short form / abstract / "informational"	May omit parents; "informational" copies are not valid to establish identity	Expect a rejection (U.S.)
Hospital certificate (footprints, hospital logo)	Not issued by the government	Not a birth certificate
Foreign certificate	Versions vary by country (Brazil accepts standard and Inteiro Teor)	Reciprocity Table decides

WARNING

- A hospital certificate is **not** a birth certificate. In Mexico, the hospital *certificado de nacido vivo* does not replace the *acta de nacimiento*.
- Avoid look-alike websites that charge a "service fee" to fill out the same government form.
- **Never** buy or accept a made-up birth certificate. A document that is not genuine causes far bigger problems than a missing one.
- **Start early.** Do not wait for the interview notice. Foreign records and corrections can take months.

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Page 2: what to look for, common mistakes, and what to do if it does not exist

SAMPLE: WHAT A GOOD U.S. BIRTH CERTIFICATE SHOWS

1 [STATE] DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
OFFICE OF VITAL RECORDS

CERTIFIED COPY OF BIRTH RECORD
Record No. XXXX-XXXXXX

CHILD

1. FULL NAME OF CHILD
CLIENT, SAMPLE

2. DATE OF BIRTH
MM/DD/YYYY

3. SEX
X

4. TIME OF BIRTH
HH:MM

5. PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY / TOWN, COUNTY, STATE)
[CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE]

PARENTS

6. PARENT 1 — FULL NAME (BIRTH SURNAME)
PARENT, SAMPLE A

7. BIRTHPLACE
[COUNTRY]

8. PARENT 2 — FULL NAME (BIRTH SURNAME)
PARENT, SAMPLE B

9. BIRTHPLACE
[COUNTRY]

REGISTRATION

10. DATE FILED WITH REGISTRAR
MM/DD/YYYY

11. AMENDMENTS
NONE

I certify that this is a true copy of the record on file in this office.

[NAME], STATE REGISTRAR
Date issued: MM/DD/YYYY

Not valid without the raised seal of the issuing office.
FICTIONAL SAMPLE — names, dates, and numbers are placeholders.

- 1 Government issuer**
Civil registry, city or town, county, or state. Not a hospital.
- 2 Your full name, date and place of birth**
Must match your passport and forms.
- 3 Both parents' full names**
Needed to prove a parent-child or sibling relationship.
- 4 Registrar's signature**
The official who keeps the records.
- 5 Seal or stamp of the issuing office**
U.S.: raised, impressed, or multicolored seal.
- 6 U.S.: date filed with registrar**
Normally within 1 year of birth. Filed later = "delayed."

Fictional sample. All names, dates, and numbers are placeholders. Foreign certificates look different: use the Reciprocity Table for your country.

COMMON MISTAKES

- ✗ Sending the hospital souvenir certificate
- ✗ A short version without your parents' names
- ✗ Ordering from a look-alike website
- ✗ No certified English translation
- ✗ Translating only part of the document
- ✗ Waiting for the interview notice to order
- ✗ Amended certificate sent without the court order or acknowledgment of paternity behind the change

IF IT DOES NOT EXIST

- 1 Check the Reciprocity Table.** If it says not available for your country or time period, you do not need to prove that part.
- 2 Get a "no record" letter** on official letterhead: says the record does not exist, why, and whether similar records exist. (Massachusetts: a "Negative Statement.") No letter? Keep proof of every good-faith attempt.
- 3 Secondary evidence:** baptism or church records, early school records, hospital records of your birth.
- 4 At least 2 affidavits** (sworn statements) from people with direct personal knowledge of your birth. Relatives are OK; not a party to the petition.
- 5 NVC cases:** choose "Not available" in CEAC and type your explanation. The consular officer decides at the interview.

Delayed certificate (registered more than 1 year after birth): can still be accepted, but expect questions. Add early records showing the same name, date, and place of birth. **Notario warning:** in the U.S., a notary public is not a lawyer. Only a licensed attorney or DOJ-accredited representative may give immigration legal advice.

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