

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I really need a check or money order? What about cash, credit and debit cards?

A: The US Department of State ONLY accepts checks or money orders for passport payment. If you do not have one, we cannot submit your application.

Q: Why are there two fees?

A: You are paying for two separate services – the US Dept of State gets paid for making the passport and the Law Library gets paid for accepting the application (making sure all required sections are filled out and documentation is correct) and for photos we take on site.

Q: Why do I have to submit my original birth certificate? Can't you just accept a photocopy?

A: The State Dept rules state you must submit an original or certified copy of your citizenship document. This is considered “primary” evidence of citizenship. A photocopy is considered “secondary” evidence. Secondary evidence does not stand alone and requires other pieces of secondary evidence to support it. The State Department usually asks for at least 3 pieces of secondary evidence in lieu of one primary document.

Q: Do I really have to have the other parents' permission to apply for a passport for my child? They are incarcerated/off the grid/don't pay child support/haven't seen the child in years/otherwise can't be located and it's not fair that my child can't get a passport without their permission.

A: Two parent consent is required for all children (15 and under), unless there is a court order giving sole custody to one parent. This is to help prevent parental abduction. If there is only one parent listed on the child's birth certificate, only that parents' consent is required. There are several forms available to parents in these circumstances.

Form DS-3053 is signed in front of a notary by the parent not attending the appointment. This form needs to be completely filled out and a photocopy of the ID verified by the notary must be attached.

Form DS-5525 is used in cases where the DS-3053 cannot be completed. This form documents all the times/ways the applying parent has tried to contact the non-responsive parent. This form must be completed in DETAIL and does not guarantee a passport will be issued. Both forms can be found at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/forms.html>

Q: Will I get my citizenship document back from the State Department?

A: Yes. Currently, the State Department says to expect original documents to be returned to you approximately 8 weeks AFTER you receive the new passport.

Q: How far ahead of travel do you recommend starting the passport application process?

A: Processing times are running long for a multitude of reasons, and the State Department doesn't see those times shortening before the end of 2023. Therefore, if you plan on traveling in the next year, we recommend applying for your passport at least 9 months ahead of your departure date.

Q: Why can't I smile in my passport photo?

A: The State Dept rules for photos state you must, "Have a neutral facial expression with both eyes open and mouth closed." For some people, smiling causes the eyes to close slightly, which is no longer a neutral expression. To ensure that our appointments move as quickly as possible and to limit the need for retakes, we ask people not to smile in their photo. The State Dept regularly rejects photos that show teeth or where eyes are slightly closed due to smiling.