

Ask for a Medical Disability

Exception for the U.S. citizenship

application tests

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To become a United States citizen, you must usually show the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) that you speak, understand, and write basic English, and also pass a test in U.S. government and history. If you have a disability or impairment that makes you unable to learn or remember new information, you can apply for a disability waiver for the application test part of the citizenship process using Form N-648. This is called “requesting a Medical Disability Exception” and only applies to the test part of the citizenship process.

1. How to qualify

What is the disability waiver for the U.S. Citizenship tests?

To become a United States citizen, usually you must show the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) that you speak, understand, and write basic English. This is called the “English requirement.” You also must pass a test in U.S. government and history, which is called the “civics requirement.” These tests are **required** parts of the citizenship process. Some people may not have to take the tests (<https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-e-chapter-2>) based on their age and Legal Permanent Resident status.

Regardless of age or immigrant status, if you have a disability or impairment that makes you unable to learn or remember new information like English and history, you can apply for a **disability waiver**. A “waiver” means you are given permission to bypass a rule or requirement. This is called asking for a “Medical Disability Exception” to the tests. This is **different** from asking for a reasonable accommodation for the tests.

If USCIS grants (lets you have) the waiver, you don’t have to take:

- the English requirement test (called the Oath waiver)
- the history test (called the Civics waiver)

It will depend on **what kind** of waiver you were granted. You can also request and be granted a waiver for **both** tests. You can still become a citizen as long as you were granted the waiver **and** complete the other requirements of citizenship.

Who can get a waiver?

It can be very hard to get. It is **only** for people with disabilities that keep you from learning or from remembering new information.

Your medical provider will have to complete a certification form about your disability and how it impacts your ability to take the tests or remember information.

Only apply for the waiver if you have a disability that impacts at least one of these:

- your ability to learn, speak, remember, or read English
- your ability to learn about history or take a test about history and civics
- your ability to learn new information or remember what you learned

What kind of disabilities qualify for the waiver?

Eligible disabilities and impairments include **mental, physical and developmental** disabilities and impairments. The disability or impairment must impact your ability to meet at least one of these test requirements:

- learning new information
- remembering new information or
- repeating new information that you have learned

If your disability or impairment is not permanent, the disability or impairment has to have already been present in your life for 12 months **or** has to be expected to last at least 12 months.

In order to be eligible your doctor or qualified medical provider will have to do all of these:

1. Give you an exam. The exam **can** be over telehealth (<https://telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/why-use-telehealth>) (<https://telehealth.hhs.gov/patients/why-use-telehealth>) instead of in person. Telehealth is a video, phone, or electronic examination visit.
2. Describe each of your disabilities or impairments including how long it is expected to last. If the disability or impairment is permanent, your medical provider should say it is permanent. They should include the clinical methods they used to diagnose your disability or impairment.
3. List the date that you were last examined for the physical, mental or developmental disability or impairment.
4. Describe how your disabilities or impairments impact your ability to learn, remember or repeat new information including being able to demonstrate knowledge of English, civics (history) or both. Your doctor should be precise and exact about how your disability or impairment impacts your abilities.
5. Confirm that your disability or impairment is not related to the illegal use of drugs.

Some examples of qualifying disabilities include:

- stroke
- Alzheimer's
- severe mental disabilities like depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- learning disabilities
- Traumatic Brain Injury related impairments

This is not a complete list. If your disability or impairment makes it hard for you to learn, remember or recall information you learned, **you could qualify**.

Talk to your doctor to help you understand what this all means. Your medical provider can help you understand whether you would qualify.

If your disability can be accommodated, USCIS may choose to not grant you a waiver and may require you to use a reasonable accommodation (<https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-c>) for the test **instead of** a waiver.

2. How to apply

How do I apply for a waiver?

Your doctor or qualified medical provider will have to give you the exam and then they will have to fill out USCIS Form N-648, Medical Certification for disability Exceptions (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-648>). It is important that you have the **correct kind** of qualified medical provider complete the required form.

Only these kind of **licensed** medical providers can complete a Form N-648 to certify your disability or impairment:

- Medical doctors
- Doctors of osteopathy (like a chiropractor)
- Clinical psychologists

The medical professional must be licensed to practice in any state of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Foreign medical licenses aren't accepted.

Ask your doctor to fill out USCIS Form N-648, Medical Certification for disability Exceptions (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-648>). It asks the doctor to explain:

- What kind of disability or impairments you have
- How it makes you unable to learn, recite or remember new information

You can turn in your Form N-648 with your citizenship naturalization application, USCIS Form N-400, Application for Naturalization (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-400>) **or** you can bring it to your citizenship naturalization interview. **It is best to turn it in with your Form N-400 if you can.** File it as an attachment to your Form N-400 form. If you turn in a Form N-648 **after** you turn in your Form N-400 **and the information doesn't all match**, it can cause you problems. If you turn in more than one N-648 form and the information doesn't match, it can cause you problems. Your waiver request could be denied because of the mismatched information.

If you have an immigration lawyer, ask them for help with the forms. You might be able to get help from a community organization (<https://wanewamericans.org/>) or legal services for

immigrants (<https://www.nwirp.org/>) to fill out your application, get help with the forms, and have someone go with you to your citizenship interview.

Can I pay for a doctor to fill out the form if they haven't examined me?

No, don't ever do this! USCIS could consider this to be fraud and there can be very serious consequences. Only have your actual doctor or medical professional who has examined you fill out the form. Remember the medical professional needs to be authorized which means they **need to be licensed** and can **only** be a medical doctor, a doctor of osteopathy or a clinical psychologist.

When do I apply for the waiver?

You should have your medical provider complete and certify your Form N-648 (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-648>) within 6 months of when you will be filing your application for naturalization (Form N-400 (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-400>)). Your Form N-648 must be signed by your medical provider no more than 180 days from when you file your Form N-400. Your Form N-648 will remain valid for your entire naturalization application process as long you file it with your Form N-400.

Can I submit more than one Form N-648 to make the request?

Yes. You might need to do this if your disability changes or if you have new impairments that start to impact you **after** you file your Form N-400. If you do

turn in more than one Form N-648, **make sure** that all your information matches. It is very important to make sure that there aren't any mismatches between your multiple forms.

If your doctor adds new diagnoses or new information to a new Form N-648 for you, make sure they also still refer to your previous diagnoses that were on your first Form N-648 (unless those disabilities are no longer impacting you). The hearing officer can ask you about any mismatched information on your forms. They should also give you a chance to explain why the forms don't match.

What if I get disabled after I submit my Application for Naturalization (Form N-400)?

You can turn in a Form N-648 at any point during your citizenship process. You can bring the Form N-648 to your citizenship interview if you need to. It is best to turn the form as soon as you know a disability could impact your ability to take the citizenship tests. But if you get disabled or have a new impairment after you submit your Form N-400, you can still turn in a Form N-648. Just **make sure** its information matches all your information on your Form N-400.

Can I turn in a Form N-648 during a second re-interview if I never submitted any previous Form N-648?

Yes. The hearing officer should let you turn in a Form N-648 for a re-interview. They should consider your request for a medical disability exception for that interview and test appointment.

When do I find out if I will receive the waiver?

During your citizenship interview, the hearing officer will decide whether you will be granted a waiver of the test requirements.

Will I be certain to get a waiver for the test if I turn in a Form N-648?

It depends. At your citizenship interview, the USCIS officer reviews your Form N-648. The hearing officer must confirm that your Form N-648:

- Describes your disability or impairment specifically
- Explains clearly how it keeps you from learning
- Explains clearly how you are unable to complete the English speaking requirement (if that is your situation)
- Explains clearly how you are unable to complete the history civics test requirement (if that is your situation)
- Gives all the information that USCIS asks for

If it does these things, the hearing officer should approve the waiver. They may be able to offer you to have your interview test in your language instead of English or let you have an interpreter for the test. They may let you skip the history civics test if you also asked for that exception.

You should be sure to ask for a medical waiver for the history test if you won't be able to remember, learn or recall history information **even if it is in your language.**

3. The hearing

What happens if the hearing officer isn't satisfied with my doctor's statement?

The hearing officer can ask you questions about your Form N-648. But they shouldn't question your medical diagnoses as long as your doctor correctly completed the Form N-648. They can ask you why you submitted the form and your reasons for submitting it. If the officer doesn't think the Form N-648 shows that you qualify for the medical exception, they won't approve the waiver. If they won't approve the waiver, **you can ask to postpone the test** while you submit a new Form N-648 or additional medical information.

They may ask you to get more information and come back for a second interview. They might give what is called a Request for Evidence (RFE) document. The RFE should tell you what additional information they need from you or your doctor. USCIS could ask for more medical records or could ask you to complete a new Form N-648. They might accept a letter from your doctor explaining the additional information that USCIS needs.

If they deny your Form N-648 request or if they deny your RFEs related to a Form N-648, they can make you do the interview in English and have you take the history test. **If you decline a test or refuse to continue an interview, it can be counted a failed test against you by USCIS.** You are given a second chance to take your test or re-interview. If you fail to appear for an interview, your application for naturalization can be denied.

If you fail the tests, you will only have one more chance to retake the tests. If you fail the citizenship tests twice, you will lose

your chance to become a citizen and will have to remain in Legal Permanent Resident status or in whatever your current immigrant status is.

What if I need an interpreter to understand what the officer says about my Form N-648 request and form?

The officer at your hearing should let you use interpreter to communicate with them even while you are under oath. Your interpreter will also have to be under oath. If the hearing officer disqualifies your interpreter for any reason, they should use language services to get you a qualified interpreter or they should let you reschedule the interview.

If you used an interpreter during your medical examination, or the hearing officer thinks you used an interpreter for the exam, they may ask you about that. The hearing officer could choose to interview the interpreter who was at your medical exam about the exam itself. But they **shouldn't** ask the interpreter about your actual medical conditions.

If your hearing officer does choose to interview the interpreter who interpreted at your medical exam, then **you must choose a different interpreter** to be your interpreter for the citizenship hearing itself. They can't be the same interpreter unless the hearing officer grants you what is called a "good cause exception". If you absolutely can't find a different interpreter to use for your citizenship interview, then tell that to the hearing officer and ask if they will grant you a good cause exception to let the interpreter be a witness and also interpret for you during the interview.

What if I also need a reasonable accommodation for the test like wheelchair access or assistive technology?

Asking for a medical exception to the citizenship tests is different from asking USCIS to give you a reasonable accommodation for a disability for your citizenship interview. You don't use Form N-648 to ask for a reasonable accommodation for the interview and tests. Contact USCIS directly through their Disability Accommodations for Appointments page (<https://egov.uscis.gov/e-request/displayAccomForm.do?entryPoint=init&sroPageType=accommodations>) for a reasonable accommodation request.

These are some examples of **reasonable accommodations** that you can ask for that will apply to the citizenship interview and tests:

- Sign language interpreters
- Extra time for completing the English and civics tests
- Being able to complete the tests at an offsite location if the testing location isn't accessible for your disability

You can ask for **both** a medical exception to the tests **and** a reasonable accommodation if you need both. For example, if you are deaf and use a sign language interpreter, you can ask for USCIS to give you a sign language interpreter for your naturalization interview. If you are deaf and also are unable to learn, remember or recall new information because of physical, mental or developmental disability, then you can submit a Form N-648 for a medical disability exception to the testing requirements.

4. If your waiver was approved or denied

I got a waiver for the test requirements. Do I still have to take the Oath of Citizenship?

Yes. Every adult must understand and take the oath to become a citizen. If the USCIS officer finds that you don't understand that you are applying for citizenship, they won't approve your application. You can't become a citizen if you don't complete the oath and will have to remain in your current immigrant status.

USCIS didn't approve my waiver. What should I do?

Get help from a community organization (<https://wanewamericans.org/>) or legal services for immigrants office.

(<https://www.nwirp.org/resources/contact/>) They can determine if other information could improve your application.

If you were denied naturalization, you can ask USCIS for a hearing on denial. This is called Request for Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings Under Section 336 (Form N-336) (<https://www.uscis.gov/n-336>). You **must** file Form N-336 **within 30 days** of when you received your denial.

You should be given what is called a "denial hearing." You can submit additional documentation at the denial hearing including a new Form N-648. You can also submit relevant medical documentation like diagnostic reports, records, and statements from your medical provider. At that hearing, you

might be given one more chance to ask for a medical exception to the tests.
Or you may be given one final chance to complete the test requirements.

Where can I learn more about the waiver?

USCIS has a chapter in their policy manual about the waiver process. You can find the information in Volume 12 at Part E in Chapter 3 (<https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-e-chapter-3>).

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice.

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