

**Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs**  
**Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) and U.S. Citizenship Documentation**  
**Frequently Asked Questions (Updated December 22, 2020)**

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (the Department) has created the following document to assist its CEAP, LIHEAP WAP, and DOE WAP Subrecipients to answer SAVE and Citizenship related questions. In addition to this document, Subrecipients are encouraged to take the following steps to respond to their questions:

1. Reference Welfare Act §432, 8 USC 1642(b)
2. Complete the [SAVE Comprehensive Tutorial](#)
3. Review ALL documents posted on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' [SAVE Resource Page](#) (SAVE Website)
4. Review ALL documents on the [Household Status Verification Page](#) (TDHCA Website)

If after following the above steps, and reading this document, you still have questions, you may submit a program question by completing this form: <https://tdhca.wufoo.com/forms/request-for-ca-program-assistance/>.

Please note: unless otherwise specified, all forms and documents mentioned in this FAQ are available on the Department's [Household Status Verification Page](#).

You may click on the hyperlinks below to move to the most appropriate category that applies to your question.

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**General Information**

- 1. Where can I find the SAVE and U.S. Citizenship webinar on the Department website?**  
The Department webinar and slides are posted to the Household Status Verification webpage. Additionally, the Department requires all SAVE users to complete the [SAVE Webinar](#) and print out the certification of completion for future monitoring.
- 2. What about situations not covered in this FAQ?**  
It is not possible for the Department to create guidance that captures every unique scenario that subrecipients may encounter. **If your question is not answered by the posted guidance**, please submit a program question by completing this form: <https://tdhca.wufoo.com/forms/request-for-ca-program-assistance/>
- 3. Do Subrecipients have to verify U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status for everyone in the household?**  
YES—only U.S. Citizen, U.S. National, or Qualified Alien household members are eligible for assistance.
- 4. Are we required to complete a new *Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) System and U.S. Citizenship/U.S. National Applicant Certification Form (Household Status Verification Form)* for WAP and CEAP each program year?**  
A Household Status Verification Form is required. US Citizens/US Nationals verifications may be carried forward to successive program years, as this verification must only be obtained once. Any household members who must be validated via the SAVE System must be verified each program year, and a printout of the verification must be in the client file. Check that there are no changes to household members. Verification of Citizenship and Identification must be obtained for any new household members on a new Household Status Verification Form. WAP applications must contain a new SAVE verification printout each year and accuracy of the other Household members every 12 months.
- 5. Will there be any alternative verification process or allowable documentation (when the primary documents are not available) for the following populations: victims of natural disasters or fires, or people fleeing domestic violence?**  
These individuals should be referred to CSBG for emergency assistance.
- 6. Do we have to retain copies of the documents used to establish proof of U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**  
Subrecipients must request documentation that will establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status for each member of a household applying for

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CEAP or WAP assistance and use the *Certification Form* to record the documents used for each household member.

- If the household member is a U.S. born citizen, do not use the SAVE system and do not retain copies of the documents.
- If the household member is a Qualified Alien, use the SAVE system to verify the document being presented to establish Qualified Alien status:
  - If the client is verified immediately by the system, print out the results screen and place them in the client file with the *Certification Form* and do not retain copies of the documents.
  - If a household member is not verified immediately, perform additional verification steps, print out the results screen and place in the client file with the *Certification Form*. Until all household members are verified the application is considered incomplete.
  - If after all verification steps are completed the household member is still not verified, provide information on contacting USCIS and document in case notes.

**7. Is the *Certification Form* effective retroactively?**

No. You do not need to change previous versions of the *Certification Form* that were used.

However, if you want to destroy the documentation of U.S. citizenship, U.S. National Status, and Qualified Alien status that you currently have in your files, you must update your files to include the new version of the *Certification Form*. The *Certification Form* needs to be filled out completely, including the name of the documents used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status for each household member, and signed by the agency staff who verified the documents.

This form, coupled with the original *Certification Form* signed by the applicant, would provide sufficient documentation that U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status was properly established for each household member.

If you elect to destroy the copies of documentation previously used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status, you must ensure that it is securely disposed of, i.e. shredded prior to disposal or Subrecipients may use a secure shredding service.

**8. Do copies of documents used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status need to be retained in the case file?**

Proper documentation will consist of a completed and signed, by both the applicant and agency staff, *Certification Form* placed in the client file. Copies of documentation do not need to be retained.

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- 9. We have a number of elderly clients/applicants who apply for services via an authorized representative due to their inability to take care of this on their own. In this type of case, will the authorized representative be able to sign the verification form on behalf of the elderly applicant and provide the applicant's documents?**

Only individuals who have documented power of attorney, legal guardian, or parental control may sign on behalf of a client. Otherwise, the client must sign all necessary documents or the application is incomplete.

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### **Establishing U.S. Citizenship for U.S. Born Citizens**

- 10. What are the acceptable forms of documentation for establishing U.S. citizenship?**

Please refer to the *Acceptable Documentation for Establishing United States Citizenship and Identity for CEAP and WAP (the Matrix)* found on the Department's Household Status Verification Page.

- 11. Are Birth Certificate Cards acceptable documentation for establishing U.S. citizenship?**

Per the *Matrix*, birth certificate cards issued by the appropriate State Bureau of Vital Statistics or equivalent agency from a U.S. state or local government, a U.S. commonwealth or territory, or the District of Columbia are acceptable forms of documentation of U.S. citizenship or U.S. National status.

- 12. If the copy of the Birth Certificate does not have a seal, is it acceptable documentation for establishing U.S. citizenship because it was issued by a U.S. State?**

Yes, photocopies are acceptable, as well as birth certificates or records without a seal, as long as they were issued by the appropriate State Bureau of Vital Statistics or equivalent agency from a U.S. state or local government, a U.S. commonwealth or territory, or the District of Columbia.

- 13. Can birth certificates issued by a U.S. hospital be used to establish U.S. citizenship?**

You have to read the fine print on birth certificates issued by hospitals. Different states have different rules. Some states allow hospital districts (which are considered local government entities) to issue birth certificates. If the birth certificate indicates that the certificate is a souvenir or if it states that the birth will be filed with the state (or local government entity in some places), it is not acceptable and you have to get the official certificate.

- 14. Can baptismal forms (with the place of birth listed) issued by the applicants' religious institution be used to establish U.S. citizenship?**

No. A baptismal form is not the same as a birth certificate in that the form would not be issued by a State Bureau of Vital Statistics or equivalent agency from a U.S. state or local

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government, a U.S. commonwealth or territory, or the District of Columbia. It can be used to establish citizenship if in conjunction with another piece of secondary documentation, as referenced in the *Matrix*.

**15. Can the Texas Election Identification Certification (EIC) be used as proof of U.S. citizenship or identity?**

No. Texas has established that the EIC is not valid for identification purposes (this is stated on the EIC itself) and thus the Department has determined that it cannot be used for proof of U.S. citizenship or identity. Refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation of for U.S. born citizens.

**16. EXAMPLE SCENARIO: Mr. John Smith comes in to apply for CEAP/WAP. He was born, raised, and lived his entire life in beautiful Arlen, TX. He is 80 years old and has no idea where his birth certificate is, but he does have a Texas driver's license with no other supporting documentation. As the caseworker, I know all this information to be true because I've known him his whole life. Do we have to deny him services because he can't provide documentation to establish his citizenship?**

As with all clients, when Mr. Smith comes in, his U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status must be determined. Please refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation for U.S. born citizens. Unfortunately, if he does not have these, he will need to obtain the proper documentation. The Department has attempted to provide as many ways as possible for an applicant's U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status to be established. There will be some learning/growing pains with both the Subrecipient staff and the clients, but this is a rule for which we must show compliance.

**17. What is a form DS-10?**

This is a U.S. Department of State form (available at <http://eforms.state.gov>) that can be used as a secondary citizenship document. It must be notarized. This form provides a way for an "identifying witness" to describe what they know about the birth facts of person they are identifying. This should be someone that has first-hand knowledge of the household member's birth in the U.S. Please note: this document should be used as a last resort and taken very seriously by everyone involved if it is used.

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**Establishing U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status**

**18. What forms of documentation will household members need to provide for us to review to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

Refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation of for U.S. born Citizens and U.S. Nationals and the [SAVE Commonly](#)

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[Used Immigration Documents](#) (PDF file) for acceptable documentation for Qualified Aliens.

If a U.S. Citizen does not have any of the primary or secondary docs, then the following link will give them information on how to go about collecting those documents: <http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A4en.pdf>. This is a two page document that explains who to contact to request different types of forms/certifications regarding U.S. citizenship, which some clients will have to do.

Remember, if the client is a U.S. Citizen/U.S. National or Qualified Alien, document identification presented on the *Certification Form* and, assuming the client is otherwise eligible under the applicable program, deliver services. Place the *Certification Form* in the client file. Subrecipients do not need to keep copies of the documentation.

**19. Will a Social Security card be sufficient for verification of U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

No. A Social Security card alone is not acceptable documentation for proof of U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status. Refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation for U.S. born citizens and the [SAVE Commonly Used Immigration Documents](#) (PDF file) for acceptable documentation for Qualified Aliens.

**20. Can award letters for Social Security retirement benefits (SS), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) be used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

No. The receipt of SS, SSI or SSDI will impact the income qualification of the client, but those award letters are not on the list of acceptable documentation for proof of U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status; those clients would still need to go through the same process as all other household members.

**21. Can TANF or food stamp (SNAP) award letters be used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

No. Different programs have different requirements for what is acceptable for verification. Keep in mind, there are certain categories of people that must be determined, so TANF/SNAP award letters, or similar documents, cannot be used as verification of U.S. citizenship. Refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation of for U.S. born citizens and the [SAVE Commonly Used Immigration Documents](#) (PDF file) for acceptable documentation for Qualified Aliens.

**22. Can expired documents be used to establish U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

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Refer to the *Matrix* for a complete list of acceptable primary and secondary documentation of for U.S. born citizens and the [SAVE Commonly Used Immigration Documents](#) (PDF file) for acceptable documentation for Qualified Aliens.

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## **Qualified Aliens**

### **23. Who is a Qualified Alien?**

Qualified Aliens are defined in 10 TAC §6.2(45): Qualified Alien--A person that is not a U.S. Citizen or U.S. National and is described at 8 U.S.C. §1641(b)

### **24. If an applicant presents a birth certificate listing them born in another country and has a government issued ID Card, can we assist them under CEAP/WAP without going through the SAVE System?**

Not necessarily. They could be considered a U.S. National or U.S. Citizen if the birth certificate lists them being born in one of the U.S. Commonwealths and Territories listed here:

1. Puerto Rico
2. U.S. Virgin Islands
3. American Samoa (including the Swains Island)
4. Guam
5. The Panama Canal Zone between February 26, 1904 October 1, 1979 (if at least one parent was a U.S. Citizen)
6. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands after November 3, 1986
7. The Philippines before July 4, 1946

The individuals described above should provide the same documentation as any other U.S. Citizen. Refer to *the Matrix* for the complete list of acceptable documentation.

If they were born in a foreign country to U.S. parents, they may have U.S. citizenship documented by a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, Certification of Report of Birth, or Certificate of Citizenship. Because Certificates of Citizenship can also be acquired through other means, they should be run through the SAVE system.

If they were born in a foreign country, and not to U.S. parents, they will need to present documentation of their Qualified Alien status and you will need to verify through SAVE.

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## **Non-Qualified Aliens**

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**25. What if we complete the *Certification Form* and not all household members are U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or Qualified Aliens?**

Household income must include the income of all household members age 18 or older, regardless of U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status. When determining household size include only U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or Qualified Aliens.

**26. If none of the adults in the household is U.S. U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or Qualified Aliens, can one of them still sign the application and the *Certification Form*?**

Yes, one of the adults would sign since children under age 18 cannot sign.

**27. If the only vulnerable household member is a Non-Qualified Alien, is the household still considered Vulnerable?**

No. This household would be treated as a non-vulnerable household for purposes of determining priority and benefits.

**28. If all household members are non-qualified aliens and we provide them services with a different program/fund like CSBG do we need to issue a denial letter?**

If you processed an application and the household does not qualify for CEAP/WAP due to household member(s) being Unqualified Aliens, you should issue a denial letter as you would for any other applicant denied assistance from the CEAP/WAP programs, and note the referral to other programs that may assist the client.

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### **CEAP/WAP Application Process**

**29. What should we do in the case of applicants that do not bring all necessary documents to prove U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status?**

Just like any other required information, applications are not complete until the U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status can be determined for each household member. Subrecipients should develop a written policy regarding how long applicants have to return the necessary documentation before the application is denied and ensure that the policy is followed consistently for every application.

**30. I am unclear on whether we can provide assistance to an applicant who claims to be a U.S Citizen/U.S. National but does not have any documents to present. I understand we are to refer or assist them in obtaining documentation, but can we provide assistance with the current bill? Do we require them to present documentation in order to consider assistance with future months under UAC?**

Until the U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status can be determined for each household member, the application is incomplete. You may use other unrestricted funds or CSBG funds to assist until verification is complete. The only



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exemptions are during certain emergency or crisis situations found in 10 TAC §6.3010(e): providing blankets for shelters, purchase of fans, AC, or generators; and 10 TAC §1.5 (with TDHCA waiver): transportation from disaster area to safety, or multi-family/shelter weatherization.

**31. In the case of U.S. Citizens who may have to contact an out of state entity to acquire a birth certificate, can we provide them with assistance and give them time to get a birth certificate?**

Until the U.S. Citizenship, U.S. National status, or Qualified Alien Status can be determined for each household member, the application is incomplete and CEAP/WAP services cannot be provided.

**32. Can we help people born in the U.S. who don't have the money to purchase a birth certificate?**

You may use available unrestricted funds to assist applicants in acquiring necessary documentation.

**33. Are we allowed to give out the *Certification Form* to be taken to the client so they can sign it remotely?**

Follow the same process you use for other documents that need to be signed by a client. For example, if you allow remote signing of an application for assistance, you can do the same for the *Certification Form*.

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**SAVE Process**

**34. Is there a written manual on how to verify alien status?**

Please refer to the Household Status Verification Page, which has a variety of resources, as well as a link to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' [SAVE Resource Page](#) which has tutorials and reference materials and walks you through exactly how to use the SAVE system to verify status.

**35. Are we expected to inform immigration and/or customs enforcement when we encounter unauthorized immigrants?**

NO! We are not a law enforcement program, so that is not required. In the same manner, if an applicant provides a document that appears to be fake, explain why that document is not acceptable and return the document to the applicant. Do not keep it or try to destroy it. That is outside the scope of this program requirement.

**36. Please verify that there is no cost to the Subrecipient.**

At this time, the Department is paying all costs related to searches performed through the SAVE system.

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**37. Do I need to run all household members through the SAVE system?**

No. Household members that were not born in a U.S. state, a U.S. commonwealth or territory, or the District of Columbia must have their documentation run through the SAVE system. Refer to the list of [SAVE Commonly Used Immigration Documents](#) for examples of this documentation.

**38. Once we conduct the initial verification in SAVE, if we are prompted with “Need Additional Verification” will we be able to input the additional information at a later date if the applicant does not have any other information that we can use at the time of intake? What will be a reasonable amount of time to wait for applicants to provide the necessary information?**

The SAVE system will keep the search in the same status until you enter additional information. All of the information we have seen indicates that most of the identification documents can be received within 4-6 weeks. Subrecipients should develop a written policy regarding how long applicants have to return the necessary documentation before the application is denied and ensure that the policy is followed consistently for every application.

When the additional documents are obtained, search for the household member within the SAVE system to add the additional information. DO NOT create a new search.

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**Special Considerations for Children Under age 18**

**39. How can I establish identity for children under age 18?**

You can establish identity for children either using the same documents as for adults, or you can have the parent identify the child by:

- Establishing parental/guardian relationship using one of the documents listed in Section 4 [the document must list the name of the parent(s)/guardian(s)] **and**
- Identifying the named parent/guardian using acceptable primary or secondary documentation, as referenced in the *Matrix*.

**40. How can we document the guardian relationship for foster children?**

Foster parents should have a Department of Family and Protective Services Form 2085FC which documents the foster parent’s guardianship.

**41. How can we document the guardian relationship in informal custody arrangements? For example, a grandparent taking care of their grandchild without formal custody.**

Informal custody relationships should be documented using an unexpired, notarized *Authorization Agreement for Voluntary Adult Caregiver* (available from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Website at

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[https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/site\\_map/forms.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/site_map/forms.asp)) signed by at least one of the child's parents or legal guardians.

**42. Do we need to document parent/guardian relationship for every child?**

No. You only need to document parent/guardian relationship if you are using that relationship to identify a child.

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**April 2019 Updates**

**43. What if a household member claims to be a U.S. born citizen but cannot provide documentation of their status consistent with the US Citizenship Documentation Matrix?**

Any individual that cannot provide documents that establish their status as a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or qualified alien must be treated as an unqualified alien, as outlined in 10 TAC Chapters 1 and 6. U.S. born citizens that cannot provide documentation consistent with department guidelines as established in the US Citizenship Documentation Matrix must be treated as unqualified aliens.

**44. Does every household member have to provide either an identity document or citizenship/residency document to apply for CEAP? If one member does not have or claims not to have any documentation do we deny or pend them until they can get it? Or treat them as undocumented?**

Any individual that cannot provide documents that establish their status as a U.S. citizen, U.S. national, or qualified alien must be treated as an unqualified alien, as outlined in 10 TAC Chapters 1 and 6. Any household with a mixture of US citizens/US nationals/qualified aliens and unqualified aliens can be served as long as they meet eligibility requirements. Income eligibility would be calculated by including the income of all adult household members, regardless of status, but excluding unqualified aliens when determining household size, as described in 10 TAC §6.309 (CEAP) and §6.406 (WAP).

**45. Can a birth certificate be used as a citizenship document and a secondary identity document for the same client, e.g., B/C for citizenship—B/C and social for ID? Previously this was not allowed.**

Yes, a birth certificate can serve as both a primary document to establish citizenship and a secondary document for establishing identity.

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**46. On the matrix there are several cards that require “the actual card”, e.g., voter registration card, if a client is mailing, or faxing or e-mailing documents, when we get the copy of one of these cards do we require them to come into the office so we can see and copy “the actual card”?**

When submitting by mail, fax, or email, copies are acceptable since they cannot submit the actual cards by these means.

**47. Another voter registration card question, If we can verify an applicant is currently registered to vote by going to the SOS or TC Tax Assessor websites can those printouts be used in place of “the actual” voter registration card?**

Yes

**48. On the Household Verification Matrix, I noticed that the Voter Registration Card is no longer listed as proof of citizenship. Most clients, if unable to locate or obtain their birth certificate, can obtain a voter registration card. Seeing how you must be a citizen to vote, can we still use the Voter Registration Card as proof of citizenship?**

In preparation of our listing of acceptable documentation to establish citizenship, it was determined that a voter registration card was not acceptable documentation of citizenship. We never like to change the guidance that we give, but it happens sometimes as new information becomes available.

As for clients whose citizenship was documented using a voter registration card prior to the March 20, 2019 webinar and guidance release, retain the guidance you received for reference during monitoring, but as of March 20, 2019, all verification must conform to the guidance released during the March 20, 2019 webinar and on our Household Status Verification page at <https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/community-affairs/save.htm>.

**49. Does a Birth Affidavit, DS-10 expire, i.e., do they have to be renewed annually for as a secondary citizenship document?**

No. It does not expire.

**50. When someone presents a certificate of citizenship or a certificate of naturalization and SAVE verifies them as a US citizen, in subsequent years is this first search verify citizenship as long as the SAVE verification showing they are a citizen is in the file?**

Certificates of Citizenship (Form N-560 or N-561) and Certificates of Naturalization (Form N-550 or N-570) only need to be run through SAVE once, as they do not expire and are not subject to change, unlike many other immigration documents. A copy of the

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SAVE Verification will need to be included in each program year's file for that household member.

**51. Should unqualified aliens be included in CEAP/WAP reporting?**

Yes, per 10 TAC §6.309(d), data should be reported for all household members, regardless of their status.

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