

IMMIGRANTS: BE PREPARED FOR A FAMILY EMERGENCY!

As an immigrant, you may face additional challenges to maintaining a safe and secure life for you and your family. Legal status, language barriers, cultural differences, and lacking knowledge about US legal and business issues can mean increased risks, especially in emergency situations like detention and deportation. You need to prepare NOW.

When considering an emergency preparedness plan, the best question to ask yourself is: "What if something happened to me (or the financial provider of the family)?" Considering this question will help you complete the action steps below to create a personalized plan of action.

Being prepared for an emergency is the best way to avert further crisis.

The information in this document can help YOU. READ ON!

» If you are unsure about your immigration status – find out NOW.

One of the greatest risks immigrants face is being arrested and possibly deported by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Knowing your immigration status, especially whether you have a deportation order against you, can inform you about what steps to take to legalize your immigration status and reduce the risks of being arrested by the police or ICE. One way to check your status is to call the immigration court hotline at 1-800-898-7180. You will need to have your alien registration number ("A number") handy so that you can enter it into the system. You will be told if you have a prior order of deportation or pending court case. If you do not know or have you're A number, but have any reason to believe that you may have been fingerprinted or stopped by the police at any time, you may already have a deportation order against you already and you should consult with an immigration lawyer immediately.

» Create a Durable Power of Attorney and a Special Power of Attorney.

A durable power of attorney gives authorization to another person to make decisions regarding the management of your property and financial affairs in your absence. A special power of attorney gives authorization to another person to make decisions and take actions for the benefit of your children. Both of these instruments can be formal legal documents but can also be as simple as a signed letter between you and the person to whom you are designating the authority. The letter should set forth what responsibilities the other person will have in your absence, should be signed by each of you and notarized.

» Keep Important Documents Safe and Accessible.

Organize and place all passports, birth certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, mortgage and title documents, lease agreements, naturalization certificates, immigration papers, criminal records, medical records, insurance policies and taxes in a fire-proof safe place known by at least one other trusted friend or relative. In the event of an emergency, such as arrest, timely access to documents can assist in determination of a person's status and available relief. Make sure that passports are current for each member of the family.

» Memorize and Have Available Important Phone Numbers.

Memorize your home phone number and that of a family member or friend who has agreed to be available in the event of an emergency. Make sure that other emergency numbers, such as for your doctor and lawyer, are in a place where they can be quickly found when needed. To locate a person detained by ICE call immediately: 1-202-305-2734.

» **Give an Extra Set of Home and Car Keys to a Trusted Person so that They Can Take Care of Children, Pets and Obtain Documents in the Event of an Emergency.**

» **Ensure that Dependent Family Members Have Access to Necessary Bank Accounts and/or Funds.**

If the primary earner faces an emergency such as detention, dependent family members may not be able to access money needed to meet the bills, especially if the detainee is the only name on the bank account. Consider joint bank accounts or talk to your banker about other solutions.

» **Save Money Now for an Emergency.**

When an emergency occurs, things can get expensive quickly. Just at a time when you need the money the most to cover rent and groceries, you may find yourself paying additional monies for lawyers, court fees, and jail bonds. In some instances your family may be required to purchase a flight ticket for a relative who is detained and facing deportation. Having emergency savings available can allow you to be more clear-headed in the event of an emergency and meet your obligations.

» **Consider Legal Issues Ahead of Time.**

In addition to finding out the legal status of all family members, it is important to also consider other legal issues that could impact your family, especially in the event detention or deportation. Some of these issues are: the impact of marital status, previous criminal convictions and tax payments, child custody matters, and the disposition and management of assets. For example, certain forms of immigration relief are only available to spouses or legitimate children. Other forms of immigration relief require a showing of good moral character that is demonstrated, in part, by payment of taxes, while most forms of immigration relief are barred by certain criminal offenses. Problematic situations may be corrected, but action should be taken NOW.

» **Every Minute Counts in an Emergency, So Plan NOW, Think Smart, and Be Safe.**

This advice holds for any emergency situation, but especially when someone is detained. Without quick intervention by a lawyer, a detainee can sign deportation orders and be deported within days and weeks. Time is truly of the essence.

This document is intended to give you basic information about your rights. If you would like to attend or host a *Know Your Rights* seminar, please contact Lisa Shea at Immigrants First, PLLC at 703-335-2009.

THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT INTENDED TO CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE. PLEASE SEEK INDIVIDUAL COUNSEL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS.

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