



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

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Immigrant's Manual: Information for Your New Life in the United States

By The Maryland Advisory Council for New Americans

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The Immigrant's Manual

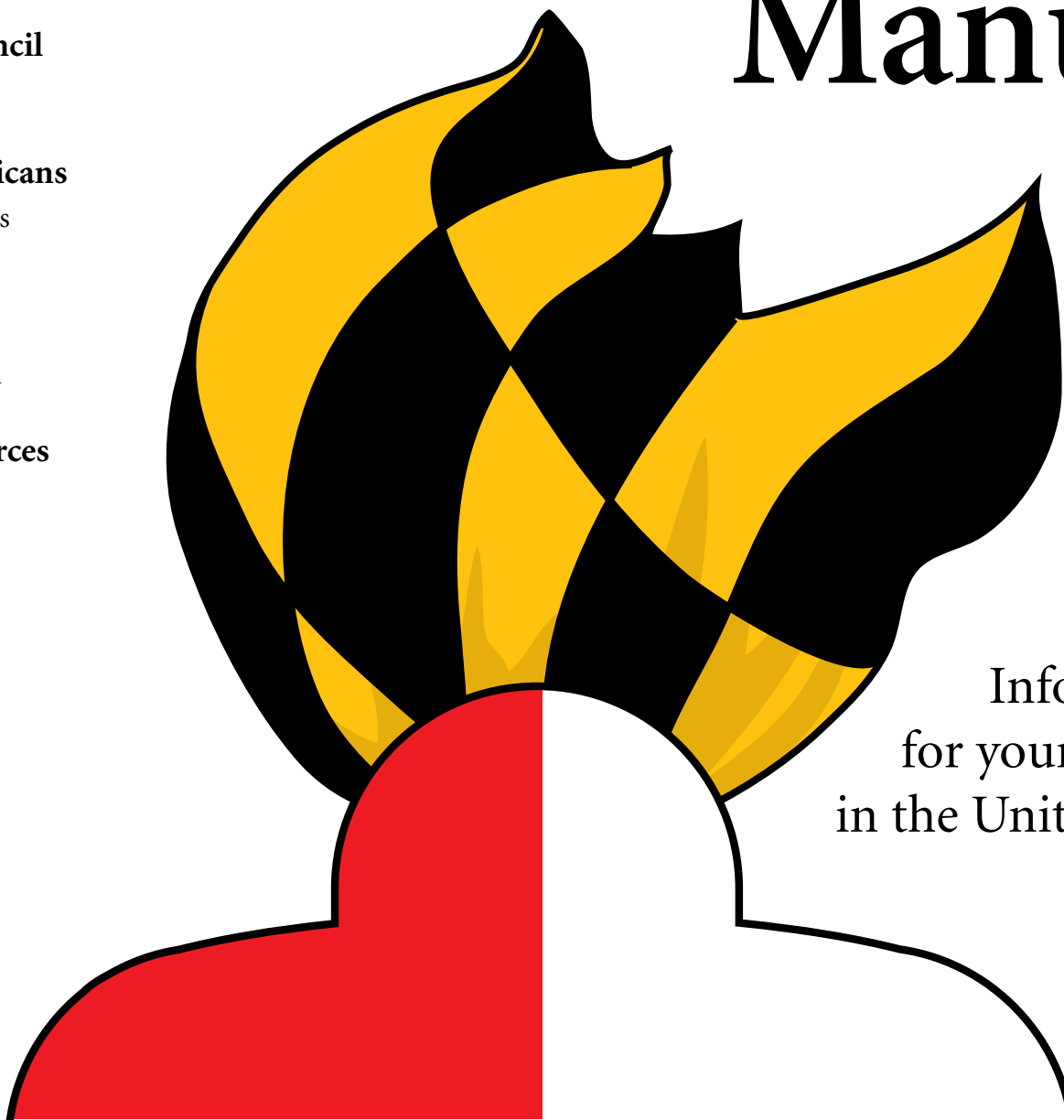
**The Maryland Advisory Council
for New Americans**

Maryland Office for New Americans

Department of Human Resources
311 W. Saratoga Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-767-7514
www.dhr.state.md.us/mona.htm

Department of Human Resources

Martin O'Malley, Governor
Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor
Brenda Donald, Secretary



Information
for your new life
in the United States

EMERGENCIES

TIP: KEEP THESE NUMBERS NEAR THE PHONE!

CALL 911 when:

- There is a FIRE.
- You need POLICE PROTECTION (because you or someone else is in danger or being threatened by someone or injured in an accident.)
- You need an AMBULANCE.

CALL 1-800-222-1222 if:

- You or your child have ingested a poison or inhaled vapors that are making you sick or dizzy.

For non-emergency help, call 311 if you need police assistance for a traffic accident, or to report a problem.



Photo source: www.sxc.hu

TIP: If you are hungry or have an emergency need, there may be agencies where you can get what you need for free. Call *First Call for Help* 410-685-0525 for assistance.

MORE GENERAL ADVICE TIPS

TIP: DO NOT SIGN any contract or legal document unless you understand what it means. If you do not understand, ask questions until you know what will happen if you do not fulfill your part of the agreement and what you can do if the other person does not fulfill their part of the agreement.

TIP: If you pay someone money to fill out any documents, make sure the person signs the document and identifies himself or herself, AND get a copy of the document with the person's signature. This will ensure they take responsibility for their work (such as tax returns, other applications).

TIP: When moving, you must complete a change of address, so the post office knows where to forward your mail.

TIP: Many important documents (such as work permits) cannot be forwarded to your new address and will be sent back. For this reason, it is better to give your new address directly to agencies.



THE IMMIGRANT'S MANUAL INFORMATION FOR YOUR NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Maryland Advisory Council for New Americans
(MACNA)

Maryland Office for New Americans
(MONA)

MACNA

The Maryland Advisory Council for New Americans (MACNA) supports the Maryland Office for New Americans in all its programs. MACNA is a 15-member board, appointed by the Governor and broadly representative of Maryland newcomer communities. Charged with identifying problems facing new Americans in Maryland, MACNA helps develop appropriate responses. Members brief legislators and policymakers on issues of concern to newcomers.

MONA

The Maryland Office for New Americans (MONA) provides support and services to refugees to ease their transition into American society, and serves as a resource to the Governor and General Assembly on refugee and immigrant policy.

GENERAL ADVICE TIPS

TIP: If you receive an official document in English, make sure you understand what the document says. Do not ask a friend to read it for you unless they speak English and your language well.

TIP: Be careful of individuals selling goods or services when they call you or knock on your door. It is safer to not allow them into your house. Also, you should verify their identification and check that they work for the organization they claim BEFORE giving any money.

TIP: If you want to do any home improvements or home repairs, find out if the law requires you to obtain a special permit before starting the work, such as remodeling, building walls, doing electrical work or plumbing. You may have to pay a penalty fee if you do the work without a permit.

TIP: If you pay money for any purchase or service, insist on getting a receipt as proof of payment. Do not pay unless you get a receipt.



RESPECT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultures vary from one country to another. Some newcomers may find some American customs of personal hygiene to be strange or unimportant, but they are an important part of American culture.

TIP: Bribing authorities is a crime.

Many cultures consider it acceptable to pay money or gifts to a police officer or other government official so that the official will do a service. Paying a bribe to obtain a result is illegal in America.

TIP: Treat everyone fairly and equally regardless of their gender, race, religion or country of nationality. The law does not permit discrimination in the provision of public services.

TIP: Telling the truth is considered very important in American culture.

TIP: Making racially discriminatory or sexually suggestive comments or jokes, or touching someone inappropriately at work could result in job loss or worse.

TIP: Many Americans are more casual about clothing than in other cultures. Shorts are commonly worn by men and women in hot weather.

TIP: It is unlawful in most states to solicit a prostitute. This includes asking for or paying any money for sexual acts.

TIP: Most Americans bathe and wash their hair regularly and use deodorant daily, as having strong body odors is considered offensive.

TIP: Most women shave under their arms and on their legs.

IN MEMORY OF DR. CARLOS E. CHIRIBOGA,
an immigrant who taught by example the importance of learning,
the value of integrity and the duty of working to help others.

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AS A NEWCOMER TO THE UNITED STATES, there is much to learn that will be different from what you were used to back home.

AS AN IMMIGRANT, it is important for you to learn as much as you can about this society, not only for your benefit, but also for the benefit of the community as a whole.

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**Except where otherwise noted, all photos by Claudia Derubeis for MONA.*

PAYING BOND

If you are arrested and charged with a crime and the judge sets a bond amount, you may be released from jail while you wait for your criminal case to be completed by paying the bond amount:

- If you pay the amount yourself, it will be returned when the case is over.
- If you pay a bond company, only part of the amount will be returned. The bond company will charge a substantial fee.

Be sure to understand fully the contract with a bond company and what you agree to pay if the bond is forfeited (lost).

TIP: IF YOU WERE EVER ARRESTED or charged with a crime in the past (even if it was a long time ago):

- Any PAST OR FUTURE criminal conviction could risk your ability to stay in the U.S. or obtain future immigration benefits, EVEN IF YOU DID NOT SPEND TIME IN JAIL.
- You should obtain the decision of the Court (called “disposition/ trial summary”) to be certain of what happened with the criminal charge.
- You may think it was a minor crime, but under immigration law you could still be deported.

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED

Criminal charges may affect your immigration status, even if you are a permanent resident.

TIP: It is likely that Immigration will find out about your arrest. If you are in the U.S. illegally, Immigration will find out that you are in the country.

You have the right to be silent and not answer any questions except to give your name and ask for your lawyer. Immigration will use your fingerprints for identification.

TIP: If asked about your immigration status, you can give your name and ask for a lawyer.

You have the right to make a phone call to a relative or an attorney (memorize the phone number in case this ever happens).

DO NOT lie or give false information to the authorities. Lies can make your situation more difficult.

Ask your attorney to find out about the possible immigration consequences and explain them to you BEFORE you decide how to proceed in your criminal case.

ALCOHOL USE

It is illegal to have an open alcohol container in public or to drive a car after drinking alcohol, depending on the amount of alcohol in your body.

TIP: Do not drink alcohol on public property. Open alcohol containers are not permitted in the park, on the streets, on your front steps or in your car.

TIP: NEVER drive a car after drinking alcohol. If you have had alcoholic drinks, ask a friend to take you home, take a taxi, or walk. NEVER risk the life of another by driving a car. Even two alcoholic drinks can affect your reflexes. Driving a car after drinking can send you to jail!

If alcohol is interfering with your life:

- Call the Maryland Alcohol and Drug Administration at 410-402-8600 or 1-866-845-8975
- Contact a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous or visit www.drug-help.com/maryland.htm



Photo source: www.sxc.hu

CHILD HEALTH

TIP: Keep your child healthy!

Wash hands well before preparing any food, before eating, after going to the bathroom, after blowing your nose or after playing with pets. This will keep you healthy. Teach your children to WASH THEIR HANDS OFTEN. This will keep them healthy.

TIP: HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS:

Wash your hands with soap for 30 seconds, especially the areas under the fingernails. If anyone in the household is sick, use extra care to wash hands more often.

TIP: Be sure to get your child immunized (give vaccines) to prevent serious illnesses such as hepatitis, polio, and mumps. Your child can get free vaccines from your local health department.

TIP: If your child swallows a poison or dangerous substance, call the poison control center at:

1-800-222-1222.*

*Keep this phone number near the phone.



IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE

There are non-profit agencies that provide immigration services for free or at low cost if you qualify for their assistance. You can ask your local immigration office for a list of these organizations.

TIP: Notary Publics are individuals authorized only to verify the identification of the person signing a document. A Notary Public IS NOT a lawyer and cannot do any legal work unless they also have a law degree.

TIP: It is illegal for anyone who is not an attorney to charge money for legal advice or assistance with immigration applications. Immigration law is complex and incorrect advice can have serious consequences. Don't risk your future! Free legal assistance may be available to help you get your money back if you have paid for immigration work from non-attorneys. The law that permits an attorney to get his fee paid through the court can be found at MD COMMERCIAL LAW Code Ann. § 14-3301 (2006).

TIP: If you are not sure, ask if the person helping you is an attorney and if they have a law degree from the United States.

TIP: When you move: If you are a lawful permanent resident, have some other status or have an application pending with immigration, you are required to tell Immigration (DHS) your new address. You must send form AR-11 to Immigration and you should also notify any immigration office that has your documents. It is NOT enough to tell the post office because they will not forward your mail after 6 months.

CRIMES THAT AFFECT IMMIGRATION

As a newcomer, you seek to live in peace and obey all laws. However, there are certain actions that are considered serious crimes in this country and can result in deportation even if you are a lawful permanent resident, have refugee/ asylee status or if you never spent any time in jail.



Photo source: www.sxc.hu

These offenses will likely result in your deportation or have serious immigration consequences for you, such as loss of green card, denial of naturalization, or deportation:

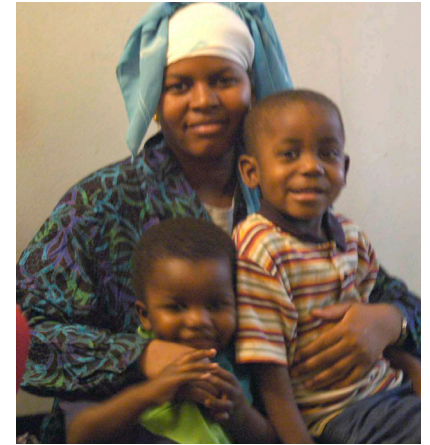
- Domestic violence. If you hit, threaten or abuse your spouse, companion, or child, you can be found guilty of domestic violence. This could include hitting/ spanking your child.
- Using guns or weapons in any illegal manner.
- Use or possession of illegal drugs.
- Crimes that reflect poor character such as theft or fraud.
- Soliciting or providing sexual acts for money (solicitation/ prostitution).
- Stalking (following or seeking contact with someone who does not want that type of attention).

CHILD CARE

TIP: Spending time with your children is very important. Play and read books together instead of letting the television take your place in their lives. No matter how much time you spend working to improve your economic situation, your child depends on you for guidance.

TIP: The Law in Maryland does not permit children under 9 years of age to be left alone in the home.

TIP: Be aware that what may have been acceptable methods of parental discipline in other countries could be considered child abuse in the United States. The law in Maryland does not permit parents to hit their children so hard that it leaves a bruise or mark. This could result in criminal charges against you.



Abused children need your intervention. In their helplessness, they must rely on capable adults who are willing to help get them out of an abusive environment.

- Call the National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-Child). During your anonymous call, their counselors can help you evaluate the situation and help you make a child abuse report to the proper authorities. If you are nervous about making a report, they will even stay on the line during a 3-way call to offer you support.
- Call Childhelp® (1-800-422-4453) for assistance.
- You can get additional information about the Child Protective Services in Maryland at <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/report.htm>

PREGNANCY INFORMATION

When you are pregnant, remember that what you eat or drink goes to your baby. Do not drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or abuse drugs.

Free prenatal care may be available. Check with your local health department or clinic.



Photo source: www.sxc.hu

TIP: If you believe you are pregnant, go to a clinic or doctor as soon as possible to get important information about necessary prenatal care to keep your baby healthy.

TIP: Avoid exposure to chemicals such as paint, pesticides, household cleaners or other vapors as they may affect your baby during your pregnancy.

After your baby is born:

- Your baby has a right to basic nutrition. Through the WIC program you can get free milk and other products. Call your local health department.
- Give the correct information about the parents for the baby's birth certificate. Correcting errors later is difficult.

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

The U.S. Immigration Service is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). There are 3 different agencies (here listed as "Immigration").

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.CIS) is involved with general applications for immigration status and work permits.
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (U.S.ICE) is involved with deportation.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S.CBP) is involved with inspections at the border, detention and bonds.

TIP: Before sending any application to Immigration, consult with a competent attorney experienced in immigration matters.

TIP: Keep a copy of everything you send to Immigration and keep a record of when and where it is sent.



Photo source: Library of Congress

MONEY ORDERS/ CASH TRANSFERS

You can get a money order (which is like a check), to make a payment. Usually the cost of a money order is between \$.35 cents and several dollars, depending on where you buy it, but some stores do not charge any fee.

You can buy a money order from the post office, banks and many stores. The maximum value of each money order varies, but you can buy as many as you need.

TIP: Using a money order or a check gives you proof of your payment. Keep the carbon copy or stub of your money order so you will be able to find out when it was cashed.

ATM card - If you have a bank account, the bank will give you a card (it looks like a credit card), which you can use to withdraw money from your account, even when the bank is closed (evenings or weekends).

TIP: If you use the ATM at a different bank, you will be charged a fee. Be sure to subtract from your account the fee and the amount you withdraw.

If you wish to send money to another country, it may be possible for you to open a bank account in the United States at a bank that also has banks in your country. You can deposit money here in the bank and your relatives can withdraw money in their country for free or for a small/ low fee.

You can also send money using companies like Western Union, MoneyGram and Gigante Express. The cost of sending money varies with each company.

The recipient will be able to pick up the funds within a few hours. Proper identification is required.

MEDICAL CARE

Medicaid may pay for some medical care for low-income individuals who have been permanent residents and who meet certain restrictions.

Medicare provides health insurance for seniors or individuals with certain disabilities and pays for the cost of hospitalization and nursing care (Part A). Additional services are included for monthly payments (part B). Only seniors over age 65, who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents and meet certain requirements can qualify.

TIP: Maryland hospitals must provide emergency care, even if you have no medical insurance or if you do not have legal immigration status.

TIP: If you do not have medical insurance, there may be free medical clinics or services at local organizations. Check with the local health department for referrals.

TIP: If your income is low, the Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHP) will pay for most medical care for your U.S. citizen children.



Photo source: www.sxc.hu

HOW TO GET CIVIL DOCUMENTS

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

If your child was born in the U.S., you can get a copy of his or her birth certificate by:

- going to or writing the Bureau of Vital Statistics
- or go to www.vitalrec.com/birth.html

For Maryland births contact:

Division of Vital Records
Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
6550 Reisterstown Road
Reisterstown Road Plaza
Baltimore, MD 21215
410-764-3038 or 1-800-832-3277

For birth certificates from other countries, contact the embassy of that country for more information.

DRIVERS' LICENSES

Everyone who drives a car in Maryland must have a valid driver's license and car insurance. Only certain offices of the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) can give licenses to non-citizens.

For information on getting a driver's license or changing your address:

- call the MVA at 1-800-950-1682
- or go to <http://mva.state.md.us>

TIP: If you move, you must change/ correct the address on your license within 30 days of moving.

BANKS

The money deposited in FDIC banks is insured by the federal government up to \$100,000.

TIP: Money kept at home can be lost due to theft, fire or natural disaster. It is better to keep money deposited in a bank.

Savings Account

The bank pays you a small amount of interest for keeping your money in the bank in a savings account. You will need a social security number or taxpayer identification number to open an account. The bank will report to the IRS the amount of interest you have been paid.

Checking Account

You can write checks to pay your bills without carrying large amounts of cash. When paying with a check for a purchase, you will need to show proper identification unless you pay by mail.

TIP: It is important to keep an accurate balance of the amount you have in your account.

TIP: If you write a check for an amount that is greater than what is in your account

- You will be charged a fee by your bank and the bank where your check is deposited.
- This can be a crime.

Find out what services your bank provides for free or for a fee.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

There are many local public libraries where you can borrow books, movies and music for free. You can also go there to read newspapers and magazines. In some libraries, you can access computers and the Internet for free or a small fee. To borrow these items you need a library card, which you can get by filling out an application and presenting identification showing your name and address.

Usually the borrowed items must be returned in three weeks or you will have to pay penalty fines before being allowed to borrow more items.

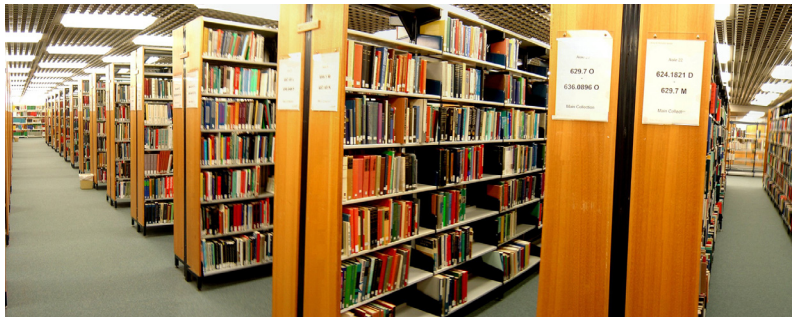


Photo source: www.sxc.hu

BICYCLES

Bicycles are convenient, affordable transportation.

TIP: The law requires the use of helmets for everyone. Follow the traffic rules if riding on the streets.

TIP: Maryland has a map of bicycle trails in the state. Call 410-545-8757 or visit www.marylandroads.com.

HOW TO GET CIVIL DOCUMENTS

DRIVERS' LICENSES (continued)

TIP: It is very difficult to obtain a license for those without lawful immigration status. Do not try to use fraudulent documents to obtain your license. This could result in criminal charges against you.

TIP: If you have a non-Maryland driver's license, the law requires that you get a Maryland driver's license within 30 days of moving to Maryland.

MARRIAGE LICENSES

You may only be married to one person at a time. If you were married before, inside or outside of the United States, be sure that your divorce is properly completed before getting married again. Bring proof of how the marriage ended, such as a final divorce decree or death certificate.

MINIMUM AGE FOR MARRIAGE

If you are 16 or 17 years old, you may get married only with parental consent OR a certificate from a doctor stating that the woman is pregnant or has delivered a baby. If you are 15 years old, you will need parental consent AND a certificate from a doctor stating that the woman is pregnant or has delivered a baby. Those under 15 years of age may NOT get married in Maryland.

To get married in Maryland or for more information, go to the Circuit Court in your county to apply for a marriage license. You must wait two days after filling out the application before you can marry. The application costs \$35, cash only, and it is valid for 6 months. There is no blood test or medical exam required to get a marriage license in Maryland.

HOW TO GET CIVIL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS

To apply for a U.S. passport you can pick up an application at the post office or call 1-877-487-2778 or go to:

www.travel.state.gov/passport/index.html

TIP: DO NOT APPLY FOR A U.S. PASSPORT IF YOU ARE NOT A U.S. CITIZEN. This will prevent you from getting a green card or from ever becoming an American citizen and may result in your deportation.

TIP: If you plan to travel out of the United States, you will need a valid passport from the country where you are a citizen. To obtain a passport, you have to go to the embassy of your country.

TIP: If you have been granted asylum or refugee status, you can apply for a travel document (like a passport) from the Department of Homeland Security.

TIP: If your child was born in the U.S., you should apply for a U.S. passport for your child, BUT you will need to show your own proper identification such as a valid passport or consular ID.

TIP: If you become a U.S. citizen and your child is a permanent resident, then your child automatically becomes a U.S. citizen. You should apply for proof of U.S. citizenship.

TIP: Make a copy of your passport and keep it safe in case you lose the original passport. You may need the copy for future immigration applications.

TELEPHONE USE

Two main English language directories are available:

- The “White Pages” lists private residences and includes information about how to use the telephone, rates and country codes for long distance calls and information about how to understand your phone bill.
- The “Yellow Pages” lists businesses, goods and services, as well as maps and bus and postal information.

You may find other directories in many languages, listing in-language resources and services.

Both directories have the “blue” section with information on local, state, and federal government offices. Both local directories are provided for free.

To make a phone call from a public phone: After hearing a dial tone, insert 50 cents and dial the 10-digit telephone number. There is no time limit to a local call.

For long-distance calls:

dial 1 + 10-digit number in the United States.

For calls to another country:

dial 011 + country code + number.

TIP: It costs less if you purchase and use a pre-paid phone card (from many stores) instead of inserting coins directly into the phone.

TRANSPORTATION

The Maryland Transit Administration of the Maryland Department of Transportation (MTA) provides public transportation in Maryland by bus, Metro (subway) and light rail service. For information call 410-539-5000 or visit the MTA Store, 6 St. Paul Street, Baltimore or www.mtmaryland.com.

Current (2007) bus fares are:

- \$1.60 for one way
- \$3.50 for a one-day pass
- \$16.50 for a weekly pass
- \$64 for the month-long pass

You can also buy passes from the bus drivers.

To travel longer distances, you can take the Greyhound bus. Call 800-229-9424 or for Spanish 800-531-5332. For information, visit www.greyhound.com.

DRIVING A CAR

- Everyone **MUST** have a valid driver's license.
- The car you are driving must be insured.

Never drive after drinking alcohol or using drugs. The consequences can cost you far more money than a taxi (job loss, attorney's fees, suspended license).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is not just physical abuse. It is a pattern of actions used to establish power and control over another person by using fear, intimidation, threats and/or violence. It may include emotional, economic or sexual abuse. Abusers use threats, intimidation, access to children, and isolation to gain power in the relationship.

Domestic abuse often begins with minor acts of violence and then it gets worse.

No one, not your spouse, not your boyfriend or girlfriend, not even the president of this country has the right to abuse you physically.

There are organizations that can help you find housing and give you information about safety. For more information, call the National Domestic Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY) or e-mail ndvh@ndvh.org. Help is given in many languages.

TIP: If you believe you are in danger, call the police. Abusers use threats to control you and the abuser wants you to be afraid of asking for help.

TIP: If a victim has obtained a Protection Order from a Judge, the abuser **MUST** obey that Order, even if the couple has reconciled and wants to live together again.

TIP: Do not remain with the abuser hoping that they will change if you or your children remain in danger. You can take steps to make yourself safe.

TIP: A conviction for domestic violence will lead to deportation. If a person is found guilty of domestic violence, that person can be deported even if he or she is a lawful permanent resident.

YOUR BASIC LEGAL RIGHTS

Minimum Pay: Everyone, regardless of immigration status must be paid the minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour by end of 2008). If your employer is not paying you a fair wage, you can contact the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, Room 207, 103 S. Gay Street, Baltimore, MD 21202-4061 or call 866-487-9243.

No one should force you to work against your will. If you are being forced to work by anyone against your will, because of threats or abuse, you can get help. The laws in the U.S. will not allow any person to abuse you, no matter what the abuser tells you. Do not believe their threats. Even if you do not have legal immigration status, the law may protect you if the police take action against the abuser.

POLICE PROTECTION

Every person has the right to ask the police for help.



Dial:

- 911 for emergency police, fire or ambulance
- 311 for non-emergency police services

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To make your community better, you should:

- Try to learn English. There may be free or low-cost classes in your community. For information, contact your local community college or the Resource Center for Language and Culture Department of Education, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250, 410-455-3694 or www.umbc.edu/rclc.
- Participate in your child's school. Let their teachers know you are interested in their education.
- Pay taxes if you are employed. Remember that the government uses taxes to provide services for everyone. Everyone is obligated to report their income and pay taxes. You can obtain a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) to pay your taxes. For additional information, call the IRS 1-800-829-4477 or visit www.irs.gov.

SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD

All children living in the state of Maryland between the ages of 6 and 16 are required by law to attend school. They are eligible for free public schooling regardless of the immigration status of their parents.

To register your child for school, call or contact the Board of Education in the county where you live. To find this information, go to www.msde.state.md.us. Click on "school systems," which links to your local county. You may also write or call:

Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-767-0600