

PREVENTIVE LAW

SERIES

Legal Assistance Program

TOPIC:

APPLYING FOR A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

October 2014

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<https://aflegalassistance.law.af.mil>

**Legal Assistance Office
Phone: 226-4022**

**Office of the
Staff Judge Advocate
Misawa AB, Japan**

HOW TO APPLY FOR A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

I. GENERAL INFORMATION. Social Security is one of the most recognized, yet least understood Federal benefit programs. Whether you are young or old, male or female, single or with a family, Social Security has programs that affect everybody. Chances are, either you or a family member are already paying Social Security taxes. Most people erroneously believe that those funds are then used only for retirement benefits. However, nothing could be further from the truth. While about 61 percent of Social Security beneficiaries are retirees, many others get Social Security benefits because they are disabled, a spouse, a dependent of someone who receives Social Security, a widow or widower, or a child of someone who has died. Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for Social Security at any age. For more information about Social Security programs, see the attached Social Security Administration's (SSA) pamphlet, *Understanding the Benefits*. You can view the pamphlet at the SSA's website, www.ssa.gov.

II. WHY DO YOU NEED A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN)? Social Security is based on a simple concept: when you work, you pay taxes into the system; when you retire or become disabled, you, your spouse, and your dependent children receive monthly benefits based on your earnings. By law, you must have a social security number to get a job, to hold an account with any financial institution that pays you interest, and to pay taxes. Your children must have an SSN in order for you to receive the benefit of being able to declare them as dependents on your federal income tax return and possibly qualify for certain exemptions and/or credits.

III. HOW TO APPLY. Applying for an SSN is easy and free.

A. If you are a United States citizen and need an SSN, if you lost your card and need another one or if you need to change your name on your current card, you need to fill out Form SS-5; a simple one-page form. The form is attached to this pamphlet, and you can also obtain it from the SSA's website at www.ssa.gov. In addition, you will need to obtain certain other documentation to show proof of your identity, age, and citizenship. The SSA requires certified copies of specific types of documentation.

- Certified copies of documents may be obtained **only** from your State's Office of Vital Statistics. You can also find State addresses and other information on the National Center for Health Statistics' Home Page at www.cdc.gov/nchswww.

- For military members and DoD personnel, including their dependents stationed overseas, the SSA will also accept a clear photocopy of a specific document with a notarized affidavit saying the copy was made from the genuine, unaltered, original/certified document. You may obtain this affidavit from the Legal Office. -- **You must bring originals and photocopies of all required documents to the legal office for a when requesting the affidavit. NOTE: The legal office cannot provide photocopies.**

-- **Child cards:** To obtain a social security card for your child, you will need the following:

A complete [Application For A Social Security Card, Form SS-5](#) (attached);

A photocopy of the Consular of Birth Report or U.S. citizenship status;

A photocopy of another form of identification, such as a passport, medical record, U.S. Government or State employee ID card, adoption records, health insurance card, or insurance policy; and

A photocopy of the parent's identification (i.e. the parent who signs the Form SS-5, the Application for a Social Security Card).

-- **Lost or stolen cards:** You can replace your card or your child's card for free if it is lost or stolen. However, you are limited to three replacement cards in a year and 10 during your lifetime. Legal name changes and other exceptions do not count toward these limits. Your replacement card will have the same name and number as your previous card. To get a replacement card, you will need the following:

A complete [Application For A Social Security Card, Form SS-5](#) (attached);

A photocopy of a recently issued document to show your identity;

A photocopy of evidence of your U.S. citizenship **if** you were born outside of the United States and did not show proof of citizenship when you got your card; and

A photocopy of evidence of your current lawful non-citizen status **if** you are not a U.S. citizen.

-- **Name change:** If you legally change your name because of marriage, divorce, court order, or any other reason, you need to notify the SSA so that you can get a replacement card. If you are working, also tell your employer. If you need to change your name on your Social Security card, you must show the SSA a recently issued document as proof of your legal name change. The SSA may accept the following documents to prove a legal name change: a marriage document, divorce decree specifically stating you may change your name, certificate of naturalization showing a new name change, or a court order for a name change. If the documents you provide for a legal name change do not give enough information to identify you, then you also must show two identifying documents including one document with your old name and a second document with your new legal name.

In addition to your name, these documents must also contain identifying information or a recent photograph.

If you are a U.S. citizen born outside of the United States and the SSA's records do not show you are a citizen, you will need to provide proof of your U.S. citizenship. If you are not a U.S. citizen, the SSA will ask to see your current immigration documents.

The new card will have the same number as your previous card, but will show your new name. To obtain a new card, you will need the following:

A complete [*Application For A Social Security Card, Form SS-5*](#) (attached); and

A photocopy of the necessary documents mentioned above.

B. If you are a lawful permanent resident and need an SSN, but you are not a United States citizen, you must send the SSA your birth certificate or passport, and the documents given to you by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Examples of INS documents are:

- Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-151 or I-551); or
- Form I-94.

Even though you may not be authorized to work in the United States, you may still be issued a Social Security Card if you are legally in the country and need a SSN for another reason. In this event, your card will be stamped to show that you cannot work. The INS will also be notified.

C. Once your Form SS-5 is complete and you have gathered the documentation you will need to support it, mail the package to the nearest Social Security Office. If you are stationed at Misawa AB, mail your package to:

**American Embassy Tokyo
Consular Section, FBU
Unit 9800, Box 114
APO, AP 96303-0114**

- Be aware that it will take anywhere from two to six months for a social security number to be assigned to you. If you are requesting a number for income tax purposes, you may need to file for an extension with the IRS.

- **Individuals eligible for a SSN are NOT eligible for an Individual Tax Identification Number.**

- If you travel to Tokyo, you may also stop by the United States Embassy to obtain an SSN. You will need to have evidence of identity and separate evidence of age (i.e., your passport and a certified copy of your birth certificate). The documents will be returned to you after examination. Parents may apply on behalf of their children under the age of 18, but they must present their own passport in addition to the U.S. passport and birth certificate of their child. If you would like more information on applying for a social security card through the Embassy, you may call (comm) (03) 3224-5000 or (DSN) 224-5000 or see their website at tokyo.usembassy.gov.

IV. ALTERNATIVES If you need to obtain an SSN faster, we suggest one of the possible alternatives below. However, please note that neither of these methods may be acceptable to the particular Social Security office your relative visits. Call the Social Security Office **first** before attempting either of these options:

A. On line 2 of Form SS-5, fill in an address located within the United States (we suggest using the address of a friend or relative). The Social Security card will be mailed to that address. Your friend or relative can then forward it on to you; or

B. Mail your application and supporting documentation to a friend or relative in the United States and request that he/she present the materials to the nearest Social Security Office. Before presenting the documents, however, contact the office to determine whether your “agent” will need a power of attorney or if there will be other requirements that must be met. You can obtain the necessary POA at the base Legal Office.

THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS PAMPHLET IS OF A GENERAL NATURE AND IS PROVIDED FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE AND CONVENIENCE. IT IS NOT INTENDED AS LEGAL ADVICE AND IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR LEGAL COUNSEL. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS AS TO HOW THE LAW IN THIS AREA AFFECTS YOU OR YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS, CONTACT A CIVILIAN ATTORNEY OR THE MISAWA AIR BASE LEGAL OFFICE FOR AN APPOINTMENT WITH A LEGAL ASSISTANCE ATTORNEY.

Information references:

www.ssa.gov

tokyo.usembassy.gov