

**Dear HIAS Chicago,**

**In December 2013, our daughter turned 17. Recently she told us that in her high school there was an announcement that there will be a voter registration for those who are 17 and over. How accurate is this information? Our family immigrated in the United States four and a half years ago, and in the near future we will be applying for US citizenship. We attend HIAS Chicago citizenship class where we learned that only US citizens of 18 years of age and older are allowed to vote. Tatiana L., Chicago.**

Beginning January 1, 2014, a new Illinois law went into effect, allowing 17-year-olds to register and vote in primary elections if by the time of general elections in November they turn 18. This change in the voting legislature is closely related to the immigrants, who haven't become US citizens yet, and your concern is completely justified for the following reason. For non-citizens, registering to vote, and even more than that - voting in US local, state, or national elections – is a violation that has very serious immigration law consequences. Therefore, immigrants of any age, young and old, should be very cautious and pay attention during the pre-election campaigns, voter registration events, at schools, when applying for or renewing of driver's license or State ID, or filing applications for certain benefits (like food stamps, Medicaid). Unfortunately, the personnel of the agencies who participate in voter registration, and volunteers who join the election campaigns, are very often either unaware of the US citizenship requirement for voting, or don't pay attention to its importance. Please remember that for the former immigrants, documents that prove their US citizenship are: Certificate of Naturalization (or Certificate of Citizenship - for children of naturalized US citizens), and US Passport, issued based on one of these certificates. Even if you have lived in the US for a long time (and at some point filed application for naturalization), but never got one of the documents listed above, we strongly recommend that you do not register to vote, and more importantly – not to vote. If you are uncertain about your US citizenship status, we advise you to consult with HIAS Chicago or an immigration attorney. Also, if you have questions about voter registration and voting, as well as about the new law for 17-year-olds, you should contact your local Board of Elections.

In conclusion, we would like to confirm the accuracy of information that you learned studying in HIAS Chicago citizenship class, namely that in general elections only US citizens who are 18 years of age or older can participate. Certain changes to the Illinois election legislature related to the primaries voters' age do not affect another very important requirement of being a US citizen, and the staff of HIAS Chicago will be happy to assist you in becoming one.

**With questions and for additional information, please contact HIAS Chicago at 312-357-4666.**