

RMI Embassy in Washington D.C.



The RMI Government has an embassy in Washington D.C. which manages the relations between the Marshall Islands and the United States. The Embassy works very closely with the U.S. Office of Insular Affairs (OIA). When problems arise with RMI citizens, the OIA assists in communicating with other U.S. federal agencies.

If you have questions about your rights while in the U.S., if you run into confusion with U.S. government officials, or if you need other information, contact the Embassy at (202) 234-5414 or by email at info@rmiembassyus.org. You can also refer to the Embassy website for information: www.rmiembassyus.org.

If you get in trouble with the law in the U.S., you have a right to have the Embassy contacted. This means that the police/U.S. government must allow you to contact the Embassy. This does not mean that the Embassy will bail you out of jail or assist your case, but the Embassy will make sure that you are getting a fair trial. The Embassy does not have the resources to provide bail money, assist with cases, or attend hearings or trials, but it will make sure that a public defender is assigned to your case, and that you are tried fairly (with services such as translation if necessary). For crimes committed in the U.S., you are subject to the laws of the U.S., and all that the Embassy can do is make sure that these laws are applied to your case fairly.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Necessary Documents

To reside in the United States, you need a valid (unexpired) RMI passport and an I-94 form (which will be given to you at your port of entry into the U.S.). **You do not need an Alien Registration Number.** As a Marshallese citizen in the U.S. under the Compact of Free Association, you can also apply for a Social Security Card (SSN). Your card should be one without any legend, meaning that it says on it that you are lawfully admitted for permanent residence and are allowed to work in the U.S.

As a Marshallese citizen, you are able to reside in the U.S. under the provisions of the Compact of Free Association. The Compact governs relations between the two countries and grants you many of your rights and duties while in the U.S..

For basic information regarding your immigration status in the U.S. under the Compact, the necessary documents for work and other related questions, you can download a Fact Sheet put out by the Department of Homeland Security at

http://www.rmiembassyus.org/Forms/Cosmpacts_FS_021105.pdf.

Because of your special circumstances under the CFA, not all U.S. Government employees or U.S. employers understand the rights of Marshallese who are living in the U.S. When applying for a Social Security Card or for a job, you should bring this Fact Sheet with you. Don't be afraid to speak up if someone is trying to deny you a SSN card or the right to work.

Resources

Relocating is a difficult process and there are many resources in the U.S. that Marshallese can tap into. These programs, such as subsidized housing and healthcare (Medicaid) vary from state to state, so you should look to see what resources are available to you in your state. If you do utilize these resources to get you started in the U.S., do not become dependent on them because the state agencies have the right to terminate your services if you have been using them for too long. A helpful reference when looking for government and state benefits is

<http://www.firstgov.gov>, a U.S. government informational website.

Marshallese students are eligible for a few different scholarships for U.S. colleges, such as Federal Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, or Federal Work-Study. Students should check with their college (or prospective college) advisor to see what aid they might qualify for.

THE UNITED STATES



KNOW THE LAW

When you are in the United States, you must obey the laws. For crimes committed in the U.S., you are subject to the laws of the U.S. Some of the laws in the United States are much stricter than those in the Marshall Islands. This pamphlet discusses some of the important laws as well as contains other useful information.

Important Note:

The laws discussed in this pamphlet are only generalizations to be used as guidelines. The actual laws and strictness of consequences will vary from state to state. The laws in the pamphlet are generally the stricter among the state standards, but you should refer to the specifics of your state laws.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is taken very seriously in the United States..

It is illegal and strictly enforced.



Domestic violence includes not only physical assaults, but also sexual assaults, threats, psychological abuse, intimidation, child abuse, and other controlling types of behavior.

Punishment

The punishment for domestic violence is jail time. In addition to the punishment for domestic violence itself, many states also have laws in which a conviction for domestic violence in the presence of a child results in even more jail time or fines. Under immigration laws, the crime of domestic violence is grounds for deportation, meaning one is sent back to the Marshall Islands and is never again allowed entry into the U.S. (see the section on deportation).

Victims of Abuse

If you are a victim of domestic violence, there are many confidential phone numbers that you can call to get more information about domestic violence or to report that you have been a victim. Reporting that you are a victim of domestic violence does not pose any threat to your immigration status. A national toll-free number is the National Domestic Violence Hotline: **(800) 799-SAFE**.

Driving is highly regulated in the United States.

DRIVING

License and Insurance

You must have a valid license and insurance in order to drive in the U.S.. Licenses and Insurance Licenses from the Marshall Islands are valid for up to one year after moving to the U.S. Because regulations vary from state to state, and because regulations can change often, if you are planning on staying in the U.S. longer than 3 months, you should get a U.S. driver's license as soon as possible. To get a U.S. license, you need to go to your local Department of Motor Vehicles (you can find the location online at www.dmv.org), present your Marshallese passport and take a written driving test. Currently, the driving test is not offered in Marshallese.

Even if you are a car owner and have a valid driver's license, it is illegal to drive in the U.S. without car insurance. To get car insurance, you need to have a driver's license from the state in which you are living. If you are caught driving without insurance, you can have your car impounded or can face large fines, and if you get in an accident, you will have to pay for the damages on your own. You can find auto insurance information online at www.dmv.org.



Drunk driving is illegal and strictly enforced. The legal limit of alcohol (blood alcohol concentration) is 0.08% in most states. This limit is based on the minimum amount of alcohol in your body that makes your reaction time and driving impaired. For an average size person, if you are a woman this is equal to about 3 cans of beer in an hour and for a man about 4 beers in an hour. If you are drinking hard liquor, the blood alcohol level of 0.08% is reached twice as fast. These figures are a guide only, so if you feel like your driving might be impaired, **don't drive**.

Seatbelts

According to U.S. laws, all persons in a vehicle must wear seatbelts, including the driver and all passengers in the front and back seats. You can face tickets of up to \$100 if you or your passengers are not wearing seatbelts.

Additionally, the U.S. has strict regulations for children's car safety. All children under 12 years of age are required to sit only in the backseat of a car. Infants must ride in a rear-facing car seat, and toddlers/pre-schoolers must ride in a forward-facing car seat. Children up to the age



of about 9, or weighing 60-80 lbs (exact age and weight depends on the state) must ride in a safety/booster seat. Child passenger laws are strict enough in the U.S that you often cannot leave

the hospital with a newborn without a car safety seat. Enforcement of child-safety laws is primary in all 50 states, meaning that a police officer can pull you over solely for the reason of not having your child properly secured. The fines for violating child safety are up to \$100 in many states, and the fines increases with each offense. In some states, parents are also required to take child safety classes.

Drinking & Driving

If you are caught driving drunk, you can face fines of up to \$2000, have your license suspended for months or years, and face possible jail time. In every state, drinking alcohol is illegal for those under the age of 21, and there is a zero alcohol tolerance policy for drivers under 21. If an underage driver takes a breathalyzer test (which measures blood alcohol level) and it shows any trace of alcohol, s/he can have his/her license revoked or suspended and can face fines or possible jail time.

DEPORTATION

Once a Marshallese citizen receives an I-94 form to reside in the U.S, he/she is bound by U.S immigration laws. Under these laws, committing certain crimes can be grounds for being deported. This means that if you commit certain crimes, you will most likely serve your sentence in the U.S., and then can be sent back to the Marshall Islands and will never be allowed back into the U.S.

Deportable Crimes

The crimes for which someone can be deported are serious crimes. This includes crimes of moral turpitude (crimes that shock the conscience of the public) where the sentence is at least one year of jail time, such as murder, voluntary manslaughter, kidnapping, and robbery. Aggravated felonies are also grounds for deportation, such as murder, rape, sexual abuse of a minor, child pornography, and drug trafficking. This also includes crimes of violence or theft if the sentence (of jail time) is at least five years, counterfeit, and fraud of at least \$10,000.

Someone who has been convicted of multiple crimes also may be deportable, even if these crimes are not as serious as those listed above. Also, someone who has committed firearms offenses or crimes of domestic violence (spousal abuse, stalking, and child abuse) may be deportable.

Again, though deportation is generally restricted to serious crimes, being deported means that you may never return to the U.S again. It is also important to note that past criminal convictions in the RMI can be barriers to initial entry into the U.S.