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Traveling with children

Question

If a child is traveling with only one parent or someone who is not a parent or legal guardian, what paperwork should the adult have to indicate permission or legal authority to have that child in their care?

Answer

Adults traveling in or out of the U.S. with children under the age of 18 should be aware of the following: because of increasing incidents of child abductions in disputed custody cases and as possible victims of child pornography, Customs and Border Protection strongly recommends that unless the child is accompanied by both parents, the adult have a note from the child's other parent (or, in the case of a child traveling with grandparents, uncles or aunts, sisters or brothers, or friends, a note signed by both parents) stating "I acknowledge that my wife/husband/etc. is traveling out of the country with my son/daughter. He/She/They has my permission to do so."

CBP also suggests that this note be notarized. While CBP may not ask to see this documentation, if we do ask, and you do not have it, you may be detained until the circumstances of the child traveling without both parents can be fully assessed.

If there is no second parent with legal claims to the child (deceased, sole custody, etc.) any other relevant paperwork, such as a court decision, birth certificate naming only one parent, death certificate, etc., would be useful.

Adults traveling with children should also be aware that, while the U.S. does not require this documentation, many other countries do, and failure to produce notarized permission letters and/or birth certificates could result in travelers being refused entry. (Canada has very strict requirements in this regard.)

All children who are U.S. citizens should also have a certified copy of their birth certificate or baptism record for ID. Children over the age of 14 are also required to have a photo ID. If traveling outside of the Western Hemisphere, a Passport is required.

Documentation for children will change when the new Western Hemisphere Initiative rules change.

As of January 23, 2007, ALL persons*, including U.S. citizens, traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda will be required to present a valid passport, Air NEXUS card, or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document.

As early as January 1, 2008, ALL persons*, including U.S. citizens, traveling between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda by land or sea (including ferries), may be required to present a valid passport or other documents as determined by the Department of Homeland Security. While recent legislative changes permit a later deadline, the Departments of State and Homeland Security are working to meet all requirements as soon as possible. Ample advance notice will be provided to enable the public to obtain passports or passport cards for land/sea entries.

*Lawful permanent residents (LPRs), refugees, and asylees will continue to be able to use their Alien Registration Card (Form I-551), issued by DHS, or other valid evidence of permanent residence status or refugee or asylee status to apply for entry to the United States.