

Ottawa Journal: strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship

Canada's immigration system is well recognized as one of the most generous and welcoming in the world, but we must make sure that it continues to protect and promote Canadian interests and values. Our Government has already taken important steps to improve the efficiency and integrity of our immigration system. The introduction of the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act, the first comprehensive reform of the Citizenship Act in a generation, will build on our accomplishments.

These reforms include important measures to strengthen the value of Canadian citizenship, while continuing to improve the citizenship system and protect taxpayers. Our Government's changes are a reflection of the belief that Canadian citizenship is not just a passport of convenience. Rather, Canadian citizenship comes with rights and responsibilities, and a commitment to Canada and Canadian values.

To help ensure that citizenship applicants maintain strong ties to Canada, we are extending the residency requirements to four of the six previous years for which a physical presence in Canada is required. We will also require that applicants between the age of 14 and 64 years of age meet language requirements in French or English and pass a knowledge test. These requirements will help ensure that new Canadians are fully prepared to participate in Canadian society.

We are helping improve the integrity of our immigration system, as we crack down on citizenship fraud with stronger penalties for fraud and misrepresentation. We are making sure people who commit serious crimes abroad can't become Canadian citizens. We are also revoking Canadian citizenship from dual-nationals convicted of terrorism, high treason, spying offences, or who take up arms against Canada. What's more, any permanent resident who commits any of these acts will be barred from applying for Canadian citizenship.

In recognition of their important contributions, we will fast track applications for permanent residents who serve as members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We will extend citizenship to children adopted or born to Canadian parents serving the Crown abroad. We are also taking action to right the historical wrong of so-called "Lost Canadians" once and for all.

Canadian citizenship is more popular than ever. In addition to strengthening requirements for citizenship, important measures that we are introducing to streamline the application process will significantly improve the efficiency of our immigration system. Reducing the decision-making process from three steps to one is projected to reduce the processing time to less than a year by 2015-2016. And, by modestly increasing citizenship fees to better reflect the actual processing cost, we are relieving the burden on Canadian taxpayers.

Canadians can be confident that the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act is protecting the value of Canadian citizenship for those who have it, while creating a more efficient system for those applying for it. Our Government is committed to helping ensure our immigration system serves the interests of all Canadians.

By David Tilson, M.P.