

## IMMIGRANTS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County has become more diverse as many immigrants have moved to the county. Who are they and what services exist in the county to help immigrants adjust and assimilate to their new country? This study focuses on immigrants who come to live in Montgomery County, Maryland. Federal law, the Immigration and Nationality Act, controls the initial immigrant experience. The 1952 Act combined and codified all previous immigration and naturalization law. It has been amended many times but it is still the basic body of law that currently sets immigration at an annual worldwide limit of 675,000 immigrants and governs the citizenship process. The most recent attempt at comprehensive immigration reform occurred when the U.S. Senate passed Senate Bill 744 in June 2013. The U.S. House of Representatives has yet to act.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) developed a position on immigration in April 2008. It states: The LWVUS believes immigration policies should “promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises; and provide for student visas. Ensure fair treatment under the law for all persons. In transition to a reformed system, support provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.” Previous League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) studies looked at federal immigration policies (2005), opportunities for immigrants to learn English (2006 and 2008), and health services for immigrants (2006).

Montgomery County has embraced the influx of new foreign born residents and has made a continuing effort to listen to their needs and adapt services to meet their needs. The Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) strives to strengthen the relationship between the Montgomery County government and residents, with special focus on underserved and emerging communities and residents in need.

The OCP connects to the immigrant community through Advisory Groups. There are separate Latin American, African, Caribbean, Asian American, and Middle Eastern Advisory Groups, each composed of leaders from their respective communities. OCP works closely with these community groups to address common barriers and service delivery. The Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity, organizationally located under the OCP, serves as Montgomery County's Official Welcome Center for immigrants and newcomers. Its vision is to help make Montgomery County “a thriving multicultural community where every resident feels welcomed, participates civically and contributes positively to the economy.”

A Diversity Summit held in November 2007 and 2012, with leaders from the Advisory Groups and leaders of county agencies established priority objectives to guide and measure the provision of services to each ethnic community. The objectives are: Responsive and Accountable County Government; Affordable Housing in an Inclusive Community; An Effective and Efficient Transportation Network; Children Prepared to Live and Learn; Health and Sustainable Communities; Safe Streets and Secure Neighborhoods; A Strong and Vibrant Economy; and Vital Living for All of Our Residents.

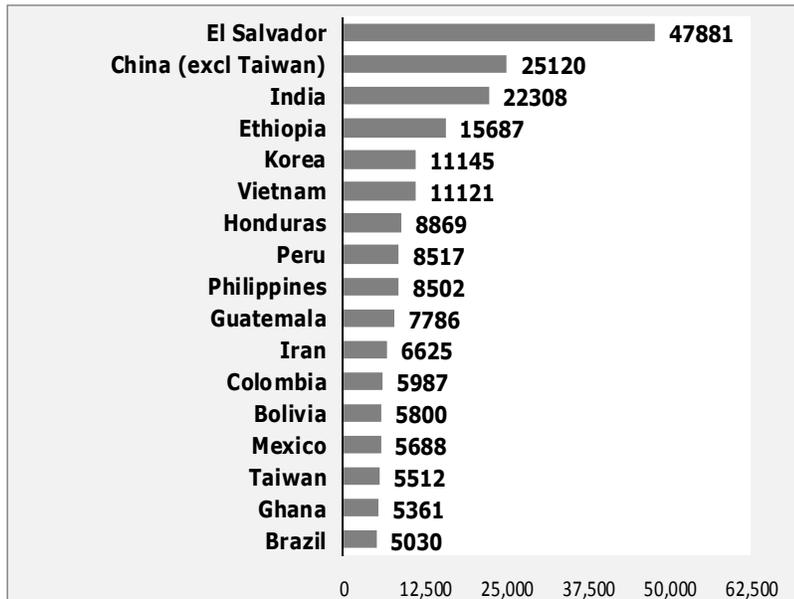
Many immigrants have come from an environment very different from Montgomery County and learning a new language and customs is challenging. Some may have come from areas where government services were hard to obtain. The challenge of helping to ease the transition and integrate these newcomers in need of county services was the focus of our study.

This fact sheet describes the demographics of Montgomery County's immigrants and how county government and other non-profit organizations are meeting their needs and aspirations. We describe the role of the public schools for children, English language programs for adults, health care resources, and the public safety and protective system. Finally, we discuss the attainment of citizenship and naturalization.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE INVITED TO DUPLICATE THIS FACT SHEET WITH ATTRIBUTION GIVEN TO LWVMC. BEFORE REPRODUCING, PLEASE CONTACT THE LEAGUE OFFICE AT 301-984-9585 OR [LWVMC@EROLS.COM](mailto:LWVMC@EROLS.COM) FOR CORRECTIONS OR UPDATED INFORMATION, OR CHECK OUR WEBSITE, [MONT.LWVMD.ORG](http://MONT.LWVMD.ORG), FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE VERSION.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

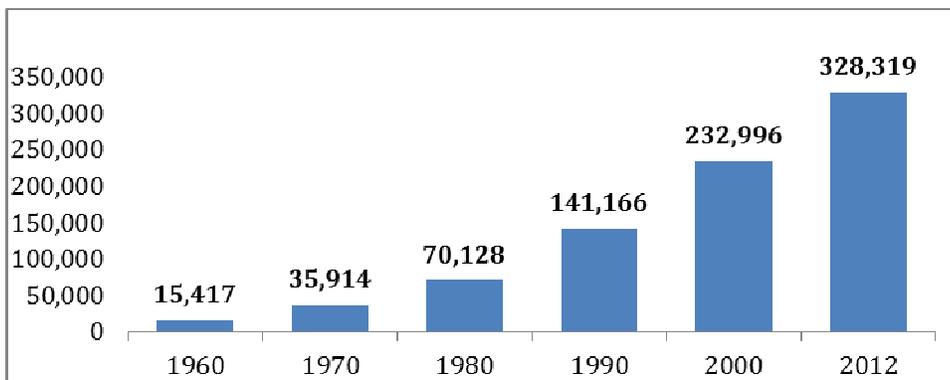
Immigrants are defined as persons who come to live permanently in a foreign country. For purposes of our study, immigrants or the foreign born are persons who were born in a foreign country and now live in Montgomery County, Maryland. According to the U.S. Census 32.7% of Montgomery County’s population in 2012 was foreign born. Of those, 38% came from Latin America, 36% from Asia, 15% from Africa, 10% from Europe, 1% from North America, and less than 1% from Oceania (islands in the Pacific Ocean). The graph below presents the top countries of origin for immigrants to Montgomery County, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 census and 2012 American Community Survey (ACS).



Maryland remains a major destination for both authorized and unauthorized immigrants and 45.3% of immigrants to Maryland reside in Montgomery County, the highest percentage in the state. Between the years 2000 and 2010, approximately 8,000-10,000 foreign born persons migrated to Montgomery County each year. Proximity to the nation’s capital, a relatively strong and diverse economy, leading institutions of higher education, and progressive state and local policies are contributing factors. In 2010, an estimated 275,000 unauthorized immigrants resided in Maryland.

Immigration is driving population growth in Montgomery County. The percent of

foreign born rose from 4.5% in 1960 to 32.7% in 2012. The graph below, based on data from the 2010 census and 2012 ACS, provides the numbers that correspond to the percentages. Montgomery County’s population in 2012 was about 1 million.



Maryland’s economy is heavily dependent on immigrant labor. In the state’s civilian labor force, 18% are foreign born workers. Of these, 75% are foreign born U.S. citizens and 76.1% are foreign born noncitizens.

Immigrants in the county tend to be clustered among

both high-income earners and low-income earners. Many are highly educated and disproportionately fill jobs in highly skilled occupations such as doctors, teachers, computer specialists, and researchers. Those with little formal education or training fill low wage jobs, often in the service sector. Immigrants from various regions of the world differ in incomes and occupations: many foreign born Asians are concentrated in management and professional-related occupations; many Latin Americans in service and construction-related occupations; and many Africans in professional and service-related occupations.

The median household income of Montgomery County’s native born residents was \$109,391 in 2012. The median income for foreign born residents was \$73,833. Among the foreign born residents, those who were naturalized citizens had a median income of \$84,987 whereas non-citizens’ median income was \$60,455.

Economic and civic contributions made by immigrants to the well-being of Montgomery County as well as services and resources needed by the foreign born often correspond to their English fluency and to their educational attainment. Census data for 2012 show that of native born county residents 65% have a college or graduate degree and 3% have less than a high school degree. In contrast, 35% of foreign born legal permanent residents who have not been naturalized have a college or graduate degree and 26% are without a high school degree.

## **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

One of the first encounters immigrants may have with government services is enrolling their children in school. The school may then become the primary point of contact for a host of related services for the family. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) enrolled 151,289 students as of September 30, 2013. They come from 157 countries and attend one of 202 MCPS schools.

School enrollment statistics can serve as a leading indicator of population change. According to an October 2013 Washington Post article, "Hispanic students for the first time make up more of Montgomery County's kindergarten and first-grade classes than children from any other ethnic or racial group, a significant shift that marks the increasing diversity of the high performing school district." According to the article, school data across all grades showed non-Hispanic whites are still the largest group making up 32 % of enrollment, followed by 27.4% Hispanics, 21.4 % African Americans, 14.4 % Asians, and 4.6 % students claiming two or more races.

A significant change affecting the school system is the number of students with limited English proficiency (LEP). From September 2000 to September 2012, Montgomery County experienced a 107.6% increase in the number of students with LEP. As of September 2012, LEP students constituted 14.7% of MCPS enrollment. Montgomery County has the highest percentage of LEP students in the state, increasing the need for instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Information on the MCPS website is available in English, Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Amharic. In addition to instruction by the classroom teacher, two offices within MCPS – 1) the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs and 2) the Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) - provide services to immigrant children and their families if additional support is needed to facilitate a child's success in school.

The Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs provides instruction, assessment, counseling, and parent outreach activities that enable English language learners to demonstrate successful academic performance across all curricular areas. ESOL Parent Outreach Teams provide multilingual outreach services in the community to parents of ESOL students. An ESOL Counseling Team provides multilingual counseling services.

OCEP helps schools engage the communities of the children and families MCPS serves to promote student learning. They focus on at-risk and disadvantaged children, both immigrant and non-immigrant. OCEP strives to get parents and the community involved and has created partnerships with many community organizations. Parent workshops are presented at schools throughout the county in a variety of languages.

OCEP also coordinates support programs such as Linkages to Learning (the largest and most comprehensive program), Excel Beyond the Bell (safe and enriching out-of-school time), college preparation and scholarship fairs, study circles to address cultural and racial differences, a Back to School Fair, volunteers to read to children, backpacks for students, etc.

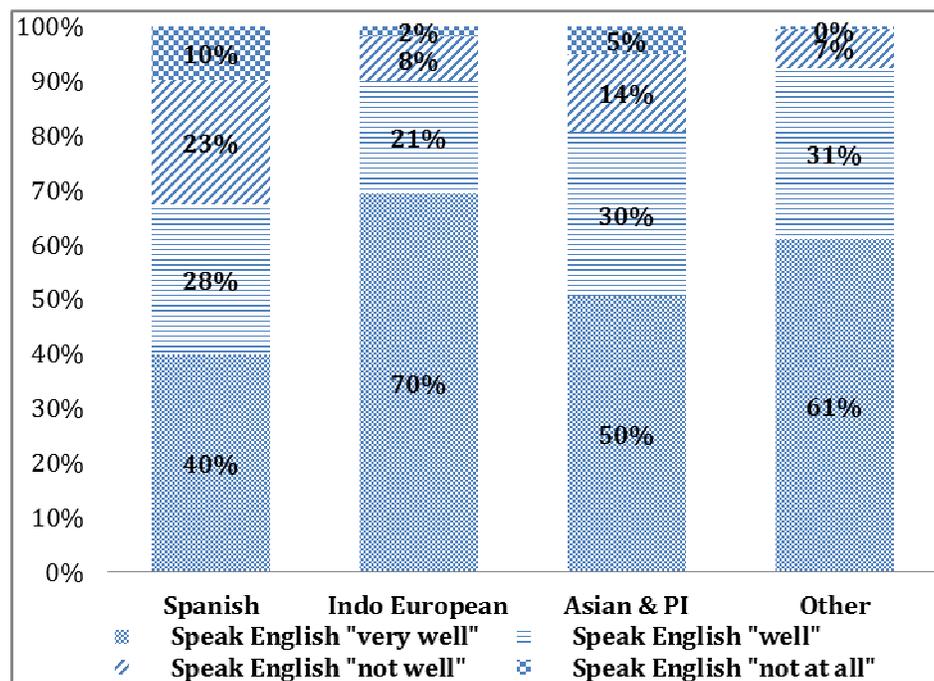
Linkages to Learning (LTL) is a partnership between MCPS, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, and many non-profit agencies. LTL provides school-based services to at-risk children and their families. Services include health, mental health, social services and educational support (including academic tutoring for students, mentoring and adult education classes, such as ESOL and literacy). Linkages began 20 years ago and is now in 28 schools throughout the county. Services are offered at elementary and middle schools that have the highest percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals (FARMS).

**Post-Secondary Education.** The Maryland Dream Act enacted in 2012 allows all Maryland high school graduates regardless of immigration status to attend the public university (University of Maryland system) at in-state tuition rates. Students must have attended a Maryland high school for at least three years and graduated from one. They must first complete 60 credits at a community college before being able to transfer. To facilitate the transition from high school to community college, Montgomery College offers a workshop titled “Montgomery College Support Services for Immigrants and Adult Students” through the MCPS Parent Academy.

**ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (ESOL) FOR ADULTS**

According to the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL), "English literacy helps immigrants become a more integral part of American life and increases civic participation, improves our economy/helps today's workers get the skills they need, and helps parents be their child's first, most important teacher, which strengthens schools. English literacy improves our nation's health, and investing in English literacy reduces crime and poverty." The goal of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program is "to help develop proficiency in the academic English needed to be successful in school, college, the work place, and as citizens." The graph below, based on Montgomery County data taken from the 2010 census and 2012 ACS, depicts county immigrants' self-reported assessment of their ability to speak English. The data are organized by the native language of the immigrants who responded and help to illustrate the need for ESOL.

For adult learners, there are currently "more than 50 adult ESOL and literacy programs, about 400 instructors, and over 20,000 adult learners at over 100 county sites," according to MCAEL. It is "a community coalition of public, nonprofit, and business partners," which serves as an umbrella organization and clearinghouse for county efforts in adult ESOL learning. In Fiscal Year 2014, 16 programs received MCAEL grants, from donors that include the county, private sector, non-profits and individuals, to support adult English literacy programs, totaling \$650,000. For FY 2015, MCAEL will award \$910,000 in grants to 22 programs.



Many programs also offer free child care so that, while their parents are in class, the children can receive help with their homework from bilingual (English and Spanish) babysitters. Several churches in the county also offer classes in ESOL. The adult ESOL curriculum stresses language development in all four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Montgomery County's Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity offers registration-based ESOL classes from Levels 1 to 4 and drop-in classes for students who have changing work schedules or who want to practice their English skills. Classes are held at the Mid-County Regional Services Center/Wheaton; at the Gilchrist Up-County site/Germantown; and at Gaithersburg and Wheaton Libraries. The Center also partners with Montgomery College (Workforce Development and Continuing Education), the Literacy Council of Montgomery County and the Spanish Catholic Center.

Adult ESOL classes are also offered through Linkages to Learning, where parents of immigrant children take English classes in the evening at their children's school. Of the 28 schools in the county that have a Linkages to Learning Program, 11 of them currently offer evening classes to adults.

Montgomery College (MC) also offers ESOL classes with 6 levels, including some targeted to specific occupations such as building trades and healthcare. Unlike most of the other programs, MC also offers ESOL classes in the summer during the day, in the evenings, and on Saturdays.

The county libraries also have many resources for learning English, such as books, videotapes and DVD's, audiotapes, and CDs that provide instruction in speaking, reading, and writing English. Ten of the libraries also offer English Conversation Clubs where volunteers lead discussions in English and no registration is required.

Although transportation, family responsibilities, and work schedules often make it difficult for adults to attend an ESOL class, the opportunities and resources in Montgomery County are considerable.

## **HEALTH CARE**

Most immigrant families residing in Montgomery County receive health care coverage as a benefit of their employment. Immigrants whose employers do not provide health benefits and those who cannot afford private insurance may be eligible for some government-supported services. Six Service Eligibility Units (SEUs) offices determine eligibility for federal, state and county government health services and help residents to access them. Listed below are the major federal and state eligibility rules for immigrants in Maryland:

- Naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents who are qualified and are age 65 or over are eligible for Medicare, regardless of income, as are people under 65 with certain disabilities or end-stage renal disease.
- Legal permanent residents may buy health coverage under Maryland Health Connection (MHC), a state exchange under the Affordable Care Act. Those on a limited income may apply for Medicaid under MHC after residing in the U.S. for five years.
- Children of legal permanent residents and/or pregnant women are eligible for Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program (MCHIP) and Medicaid and for the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program. Any child born in the US is entitled to MCHIP and WIC.

**Public Health Services** - The public health services available to low-income immigrants in the county are the same as those serving other uninsured low-income county residents. The policy of Montgomery County and its allied programs is to serve all qualified, low-income, uninsured residents without regard to race, creed or immigration status. No questions are asked about status when determining eligibility for county-funded services.

**Health Services for Children** - Care for Kids is a Montgomery County-funded program that provides health care to children from birth to age 18 whose families' incomes exceed the Medicaid limit, but are not high enough to pay private insurance. It accepts children whose families earn less than 250% of the federal poverty level and it includes well child and sick care, pharmacy, lab testing and some limited specialized care.

In addition to the Linkages to Learning programs of MCPS, certain schools have established School-Based Health and Wellness Centers which offer coordinated medical care, preventive and psychosocial services, counseling and health education. Mental health services are available to students and their families.

**Health Services for Adults:** Montgomery Cares provides high quality health services to uninsured, low-income residents by linking together 30 independent safety net clinics and programs under one umbrella. The county funds the program and the Primary Care Coalition, an independent, nonprofit organization, administers it. Among the clinics are several that serve particular immigrant populations such as the Pan Asian Volunteer Health Clinic, Projecto Salud, The Spanish Catholic Center, the Muslim Community Center Health Clinic, and

La Clinique L’A.M.I. which serves the French-speaking Caribbean and African community and others. Most clinics charge a modest fee for clinic services. Montgomery Cares collaborates with local hospitals for inpatient services.

The Maternity Partnership Program is a county-funded program for limited-income uninsured pregnant women and teens that provides prenatal care, routine laboratory work, prenatal classes and dental hygienist screening. Holy Cross, Adventist and Shady Grove hospitals participate in the program. After the SEU declares eligibility, the woman selects the hospital where she will have her prenatal care and delivery. She is asked to pay \$450 for the prenatal services. At the time of delivery she becomes eligible for Medicaid and the physician costs for delivery are paid.

Montgomery County’s rich diversity includes a large number of immigrant providers of health care. They are scientists, physicians, nurses and allied professionals that serve in private practices and hospitals. Some have received their training abroad, others in the U.S. A large number of immigrants serve in low-paying but essential services in hospitals and other institutions as aides or in kitchens or housekeeping. All of these individuals represent a valuable human resource to Montgomery County.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Public safety agencies' approach to immigration issues, providing protection while building trust in the community, is central to achieving public safety. Agencies providing public safety include the Police department, Fire and Rescue Services, Sheriff, Homeland Security, and Correction and Rehabilitation.

Montgomery County was required by federal officials in 2011 to implement Secure Communities, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) program designed to identify immigrants in U.S. jails who are deportable under immigration law. Under Secure Communities, participating jails submit arrestees’ fingerprints not only to criminal databases, but to immigration databases as well, allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) access to information on individuals held in jails.

The Montgomery County Council passed a resolution in May 2011 expressing concern “that the Secure Communities program, as currently administered, will create division in our community, promote a culture of fear, and dismantle the trust that our police officers have worked to establish in many immigrant communities throughout the County.”

The Latino Public Safety Workgroup, a subgroup of the Latin American Advisory Group, was formed to provide a forum for representatives from the county’s public safety departments and community leaders from organizations such as Catholic Charities, CASA de Maryland, Identity, the Montgomery County Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, etc. to discuss issues and exchange ideas about the best approach to meeting the county’s and community’s needs.

The Police Chief has a Latino Liaison Group that he meets with monthly. Community policing is used in all six districts: Rockville, Bethesda, Silver Spring, Wheaton, Germantown, and Montgomery Village. The Police Department had a dedicated Latino Liaison assigned to the Chief’s Office up until the economic downturn of 2008/2009. Now outreach efforts are handled in each district. In addition, there are currently 20 School Resource Officers (SRO) (police officers) assigned to work in the 25 high schools throughout the county. They focus on crime prevention and relationship building.

The Police Department employs a Hispanic Liaison, operating from headquarters, who is responsible for coordinating closely with the Latino/Hispanic Media on all matters of interest to the community such as weather alerts, crime, and public health emergencies. The Hispanic Liaison hosts a weekly TV program “Dialogando con la Policia del Condado de Montgomery,” to keep the community informed. In addition, the Police Department held six community forums for the Latino community in 2013 to talk about places to which they can turn if they are the victims of crime or fraud.

## **CITIZENSHIP/NATURALIZATION**

Immigrants who are legal permanent residents (LPR) (green card holders) for at least 5 years are eligible to apply for naturalization with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). LPRs must be 18 or older at the time of filing the Form N-400, Application for Naturalization; be able to read, write, and speak English; have knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government (civics); be a person of good moral character, and well-disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States; and meet all residency requirements. The fee for naturalization is \$680. A successful applicant does not become a citizen until he or she also takes an oath of citizenship.

**Citizenship Classes** - The Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity offers citizenship preparation classes through a partnership with Baltimore City Community College, a recipient of USCIS grants intended for immigrant instruction in civics and citizenship application. Citizenship classes are offered at all Gilchrist sites free of charge. In its FY2013 annual report, the Center reported the geographic origins of its clients. The top 15 countries of origin were El Salvador (460), Ethiopia (193), USA (166), Peru (148), Colombia (93), China (79), Bolivia (67), Guatemala (64), Honduras (58), Iran (54), Mexico (47), Ecuador (44), Dominican Republic (42), Haiti (37), and Cameroon (37).

Montgomery College (MC), recipient of USCIS grants since 2010, has used the funds, including a 2013-15 grant of \$250,000, to provide citizenship classes through its Workforce Development and Continuing Education unit. The classes, offered at no cost to legal permanent residents, draw their content from U.S. history and government. The Enhanced Integration Tasks part of the curriculum requires students to complete tasks in the community that promote civic engagement and integration.

MC offers about 30 classes per fiscal year and serves around 400 immigrants from approximately 60 different countries and 40 different languages. In FY 2012, 90% of MC students who applied for naturalization became U.S. citizens; 99% of students who attended the naturalization interview and took the test, passed the first time. In FY 2012, the Montgomery College program was named one of USCIS's best-practice programs for the third consecutive year.

Although Montgomery College reaches out in multiple ways to inform the immigrant community of available classes, the director of the MC program advises that more resources are needed to meet immigrants' needs for assistance in preparing for the USCIS citizenship exam.

Citizenship preparation classes are also available in the county through the New American Project of Citizenship Maryland, a joint effort of CASA de Maryland and AmeriCorps; Catholic Charities; and other non-profits.

**Legal Assistance:** The USCIS Web site warns legal permanent residents preparing to file for citizenship about the many scams that are continually perpetrated on those needing legal help in filing naturalization forms; it provides extensive guidance on how to select the appropriate legal advisor.

The Gilchrist Center-Wheaton library site makes referrals for limited pro bono legal assistance through a partnership with the Bar Foundation of Montgomery County. Other sources of inexpensive legal assistance include CASA de Maryland and Catholic Charities Legal Immigration Services, which work with volunteer attorneys to aid low-income residents needing legal assistance.

**Citizenship Status of Foreign Born:** Although Montgomery County provides many services to LPRs on their path to citizenship, the rate of naturalization varies by the number of years an immigrant has resided in the country. Some immigrants become naturalized almost immediately upon becoming eligible—for most this occurs 5 years after becoming a legal permanent resident. Others take longer. According to the American Community Survey, 51% of the foreign born in Montgomery County have not achieved citizenship. Of the 49% who are naturalized, 24% were naturalized before 1990, 64% from 1990-2009, and 12% were naturalized 2010 or later.

U.S. citizenship confers important benefits on recipients: the right to vote, eligibility to participate in federal programs and employment, and some legal rights. Deterrents to naturalization are the costs of filing an application, the complicated administrative process during the path to citizenship, limited English proficiency, and reluctance to give up allegiance to one's native country.

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