

## Immigration Attorney Urges Permanent Residents to Carry Green Cards and Know Their Rights

**Tamika Jude says permanent residents must carry original green cards at all times and avoid signing legal documents or pleading guilty without counsel, as even minor offenses can affect immigration status.**

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Permanent residents in the United States need to be particularly aware of their legal obligations – and their rights – in the current climate, says immigration attorney Tamika Jude.

Consortium journalists reached out to Ms. Jude, seeking insight on the current, stricter enforcement environment for visitors and immigrants to the U.S. There now needs to be closer attention paid to compliance with immigration requirements, said the Florida-based attorney. People should also avoid attempting to navigate the legal system on their own if they find themselves detained for alleged immigration violations, and should seek legal advice from a

specialist in the field.

Ms. Jude notes that some laws which could previously be ignored with little consequence — such as the requirement that permanent residents keep their “green card” in their possession at all times — are now being rigorously enforced.

“Some people leave their green cards at home for safekeeping, but that could land them in hot water,” Ms. Jude said. “The law actually says you have to carry the card with you.” Unfortunately, photocopies aren't an acceptable substitute, Ms. Jude advised. “Having something is better than having nothing, but keep in mind that in the current climate you may still get charged if carrying a copy.” A violation of this provision is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$100, or 30 days in prison. Ms. Jude suggests ensuring that the original document is kept in a wallet or purse that has also been equipped with an AirTag or similar tracker, so that it can easily be found if misplaced.

Avoiding conflict with the law in this fashion, the attorney says, is now more important than ever. “Even minor offenses can have significant immigration consequences,” Ms. Jude noted. Non-citizens should never plead guilty to any charges without first consulting an immigration lawyer, “even if promised no jail time.” Having adequate legal representation is the best way to “navigate potential impacts on your immigration status,” she said.

Permanent residents need to ensure that their green cards remain valid, filing for renewal well in advance of the expiration date so they don't lose legal status. Other requirements, such as change of address notifications, or maintaining continuous residence in the U.S., must be scrupulously adhered to, to avoid loss of status. Ms. Jude suggests that green card holders who meet eligibility requirements for U.S. citizenship should consider applying, as naturalization confers several benefits, including the right to vote and protection against deportation.

Meanwhile, non-immigrant visa holders should also ensure that they strictly comply with the terms of their visa. A new requirement that will take effect this coming April is that all visitors aged 14 and older must now register with the federal government if they plan to stay in the United States for 30 days or more. “This initiative aims to enforce longstanding registration laws that were previously underutilized,” Ms. Jude noted. Persons must complete an online registration process that includes providing personal information, including fingerprints. “Failure to register within the stipulated time frame may result in fines, imprisonment, or other legal actions,” Ms. Jude said.

Otherwise, visa holders must also ensure that their activity within the United States falls within the bounds of what is allowed by the specific visa they were granted. For example, those with visitors' visas may not accept employment or attend school, while holders of student visas must maintain full-time enrollment in an educational institution. Overstaying your allotted time in the United States is a practice Ms. Jude strongly discourages, as that could lead to “severe consequences, including removal proceedings and re-entry bans.”

In the event that an individual is, in fact, detained by immigration authorities, Ms. Jude says that it is “crucial to understand your rights and the appropriate steps to take.” She strongly advises that people who find themselves in this situation do everything they can to remain calm and composed. “Avoid arguing or resisting, as this can escalate the situation,” the attorney said. She suggests resisting the temptation to speak in an attempt to explain your circumstances. “Politely inform officers that you wish to remain silent until you have legal representation.” However, Ms. Jude emphasized that, while persons have the right to legal counsel, “note that in immigration

proceedings, the government is not required to provide a free attorney. You may need to find and hire one yourself.”

She reminds that people do have the right to present their case before a judge in immigration court if removal proceedings are initiated against them. Such proceedings are accompanied by a “Notice to Appear,” which must outline the reasons why the government believes an individual should be removed from the country. “Your attorney can help you understand the charges against you and explore possible defenses or relief options,” Ms. Jude noted.

Whether you decide to retain counsel or not, Ms. Jude says that persons in detention should never “sign any documents without fully understanding their content.” Some may be asked to consent to voluntary departure, or to waive their rights. It is imperative that people understand what they are agreeing to when signing a document presented to them by authorities.

In the current environment of heightened immigration enforcement, Ms. Jude advises travelers to “immediately identify an attorney you would like to use if you find yourself detained.” She suggests ensuring that your chosen representative's contact information be kept close, and shared with family and friends so they know who to call in the event you are detained. “It would be a good idea to provide your attorney with copies of all your documents so that they will be prepared if you are detained and they need to get your bond or represent you while detained,” Ms. Jude said.

Notwithstanding, her key takeaway for all visitors and permanent residents is to stay abreast of current immigration laws and policies to ensure compliance. “Regularly consult reputable sources or legal counsel to stay updated on any developments that may affect your status,” Ms. Jude advised.