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Applications for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LIRF): Fact Sheet

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Over the years, Congress has passed legislation to provide access to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status to certain groups of foreign nationals living in the United States without permanent status. The 116th Congress passed a measure of this type entitled Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF). LRIF provides an opportunity for Liberians who have been continuously present in the United States since November 2014 and their family members to obtain LPR status.¹ Enacted as part of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92, §7611), it gives individuals until December 20, 2020, to apply for LPR status. This fact sheet presents data on applications received by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under LRIF during the first four months of the application period. It will be updated as application data covering the remainder of the application period are made available.

Background

Under a series of executive branch actions beginning in 1991, certain groups of Liberians have been allowed to live and work in the United States regardless of whether they have a lawful immigration status. Liberians in the United States first received temporary protected status (TPS) in March 1991 following the outbreak of civil war in their home country. TPS is a statutory form of temporary immigration relief for individuals from countries experiencing armed conflict, natural disaster, or extraordinary conditions that prevent their safe return.² Since the 1991 TPS designation, certain Liberians in the United States have been covered by TPS or by deferred enforced departure (DED), another form of blanket immigration relief.³ The most recent TPS designation for Liberia ended on May 17, 2017, and a long-running DED designation was set to expire on March 30, 2020, but President Trump delayed the effective date of its expiration (to January 10, 2021) in order to provide continuous employment authorization to Liberians eligible to adjust their status under the recently enacted legislation.

Beginning with the 105th Congress, bills to provide LPR status to Liberians have been introduced by every Congress but have not been enacted. In December 2019, Congress passed LRIF (in P.L. 116-92, §7611), providing Liberians an opportunity to obtain LPR status and citizenship if they had been living in the United States since November 20, 2014, and had not been convicted of certain crimes.⁴ LRIF applies to Liberian nationals who have been living in the United States since this date regardless of whether they had been covered by TPS or DED.

¹ The spouse, unmarried child under 21, or unmarried son or daughter 21 years old or older of a Liberian national who meets the requirements of LRIF and has applied for lawful permanent residence based on LRIF is also eligible to apply for LRIF.

² Under INA Section 244 (8 U.S.C. §1254a), the Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a country for TPS for periods of 6, 12, or 18 months and may subsequently extend the designation if conditions continue to be met. Nationals of a designated country living in the United States may apply for TPS, which provides temporary protection from removal and work authorization. For more information, see CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*.

³ DED is a temporary, discretionary, administrative stay of removal granted to aliens from designated countries. Unlike TPS, a DED designation emanates from the President's constitutional powers to conduct foreign relations and has no statutory basis.

⁴ This was the date by which Liberians had to have been present in the United States to qualify for its most recent TPS designation (related to the Ebola epidemic). Individuals who have been convicted of an aggravated felony, two or more crimes involving moral turpitude, or who have participated in the persecution of others are ineligible for LRIF.

LRIF Applications

To be eligible for LPR status under LRIF, applicants must complete and file Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, by December 20, 2020, which is one year since LRIF was enacted. According to data provided to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) by USCIS, it had received 1,226 LRIF applications as of April 17, 2020, four months into the program.⁵ At that time, all of the applications received were still being processed (i.e., none had been adjudicated). The data provided to CRS did not indicate how many had applied as Liberians who entered before November 2014 or had applied as their family members.

Age and Sex of Applicants

The median age of applicants was 46. Almost half (47%) were aged 45–64, and an additional 38% were aged 19–44. Seven percent were 18 or younger, and 8% were 65 or older. Fifty-eight percent were female and 42% were male.

State of Residence of Applicants

As of April 17, 2020, USCIS had received LRIF applications from residents of 36 states. Minnesota accounted for the most applicants (214), followed by Pennsylvania (188), Maryland (109), and New Jersey (96). (See **Table 1** and **Figure 1**.)

Table 1. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of April 17, 2020

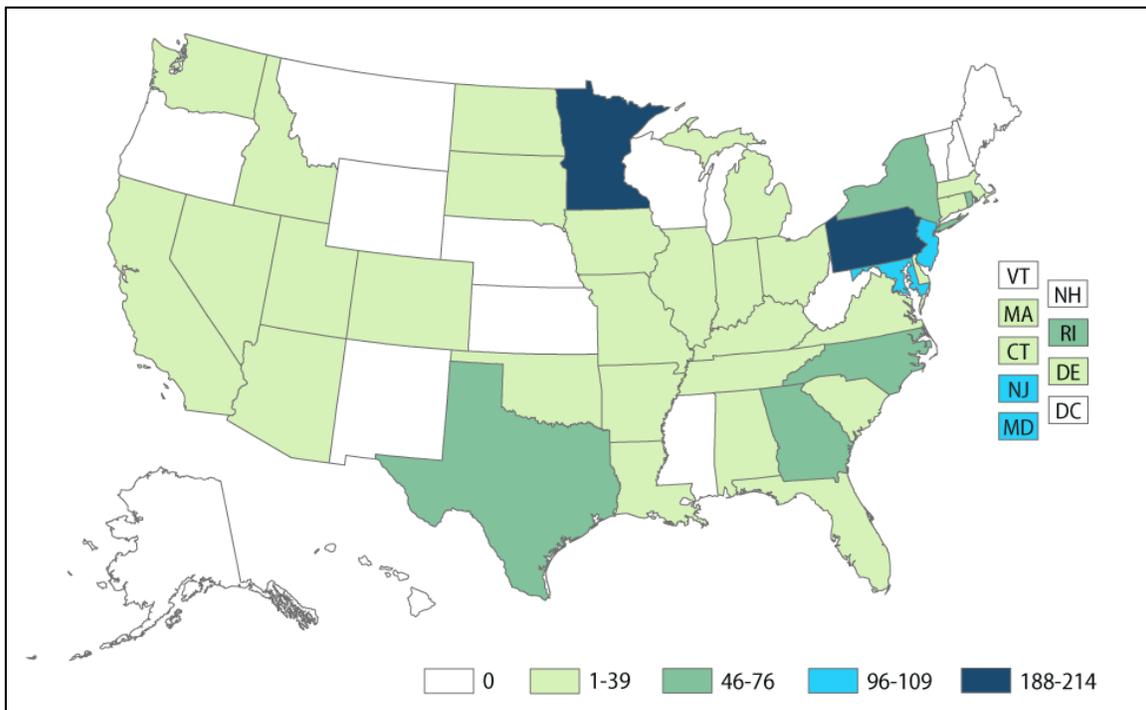
State	Applications	State	Applications
Alabama	3	Montana	0
Alaska	0	Nebraska	0
Arizona	4	Nevada	1
Arkansas	2	New Hampshire	0
California	18	New Jersey	96
Colorado	3	New Mexico	0
Connecticut	2	New York	67
Delaware	22	North Carolina	76
District of Columbia	0	North Dakota	25
Florida	9	Ohio	18
Georgia	67	Oklahoma	2
Hawaii	0	Oregon	0
Idaho	1	Pennsylvania	188
Illinois	9	Rhode Island	46
Indiana	12	South Carolina	4

⁵ One-third of applications were received in each of February and March 2020. Twenty percent were received in January 2020, 10% were received in the first half of April 2020 (through April 17), and three applications were received in December 2019.

State	Applications	State	Applications
Iowa	10	South Dakota	5
Kansas	0	Tennessee	7
Kentucky	7	Texas	53
Louisiana	1	Utah	4
Maine	0	Vermont	0
Maryland	109	Virginia	25
Massachusetts	39	Washington	6
Michigan	15	West Virginia	0
Minnesota	214	Wisconsin	0
Mississippi	0	Wyoming	0
Missouri	2	Total	1,226

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Figure I. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of April 17, 2020



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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