



Backgrounder: Jurisdictions in the U.S. Permitting Hiring of Noncitizens as Law Enforcement Officers (Update)

Introduction

Police departments and sheriff's offices nationwide have faced acute [staffing shortages](#), prompting a growing number of states and localities to reconsider traditional U.S. citizenship requirements for law enforcement officers. While most states continue to require candidates to have citizenship,¹ an increasing share have created pathways for lawful permanent residents (LPRs), individuals with legal work authorization, or, in limited circumstances, other noncitizens to serve in law enforcement positions.

As a follow-up to the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force's (LEITF) 2021 [Backgrounder: Jurisdictions Permitting LPR Hiring](#), which itself followed the 2017 paper "[Filling the Ranks](#)," this updated backgrounder provides an overview of jurisdictions that now permit noncitizens to be considered for law enforcement roles. States fall into several categories: those with no citizenship requirements; those allowing candidates with any form of legal work authorization; those restricting eligibility to LPRs; those creating special pathways for LPRs with military service; and those creating opportunities for DACA recipients. Local governments often add their own rules, resulting in a complex patchwork of standards.

Overall, the national trend reflects growing recognition that expanding eligibility to qualified noncitizens—particularly those who are LPRs, work-authorized, or have served in the U.S. military—can help departments address recruitment challenges while maintaining public safety.

States with No Citizenship Requirements

Colorado

¹ States with citizenship-only requirements include: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey (legislation pending), New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin (legislation pending), Wyoming.

Colorado has no statewide citizenship requirement, [allowing](#) departments to hire any work-authorized individual. Despite this flexibility, major cities apply their own policies. [Denver](#), for instance, allows hiring noncitizens who have work authorization (including DACA recipients), [Aurora](#) and [Boulder](#) permit LPR applicants, and [El Paso County](#) maintains a citizenship requirement.

Vermont

Vermont also [lacks](#) a statewide citizenship requirement. The city of [Burlington](#), however, permits law enforcement officer candidates to be LPRs or citizens.

West Virginia

[West Virginia](#) imposes no statewide citizenship requirement for law enforcement officers. However, many major cities, such as [Huntington](#), [Morgantown](#), and [Wheeling](#), require U.S. citizenship for their police officers. It is unclear whether other municipalities in West Virginia actively hire noncitizens for these roles.

States Permitting Candidates Possessing Legal Work Authorization

Maine

Maine explicitly [allows](#) any individual with legal work authorization to apply for law enforcement positions. However, the requirements vary by jurisdiction. For instance, the [Maine State Police](#) and Portland's police department require noncitizen applicants to be LPRs, but some local police departments consider noncitizens with valid work authorization.

California

California has adopted the same standard, [permitting](#) candidates with legal work authorization to serve. Some large cities, nonetheless, continue to limit the hiring of police officers to U.S. citizens and LPRs, such as the [San Diego Police Department](#).

Illinois

In 2023, Illinois [passed](#) a bill that [allows](#) work-authorized noncitizens, including [Dreamers](#), to work as police officers. The bill [amended](#) the Illinois Municipal Code to provide “that an individual who is not a citizen but is legally authorized to work in the United States under federal law is authorized to apply for the position of police officer, subject to all requirements and limitations, other than citizenship, to which other applicants are subject.” The bill, however, [allows](#) localities to decide whether to allow the hiring of noncitizens as police officers. In that regard, the Chicago and Champaign Police Departments [allow](#) noncitizens with work authorization to be hired.

New Mexico

In 2025, New Mexico [passed](#) a [bill](#) that mirrors Illinois' law, [permitting](#) both citizens and work-authorized noncitizens to work as police officers. The bill, however, allows local jurisdictions to maintain stricter citizenship rules. For instance, the cities of [Gallup](#) and [Alamogordo](#) continue to require U.S. citizenship to be considered for the position.

State Requiring “Unrestricted Employment”

Hawaii

[Hawaii](#) requires candidates to be LPRs or eligible for “[unrestricted employment](#)” under federal law. Unrestricted employment refers to federal employment authorization that is not limited to a specific employer, job, or location. It includes permanent unrestricted employment (available to U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees, and asylees) and temporary unrestricted employment, where individuals hold a USCIS Employment Authorization Document (EAD) — such as certain adjustment applicants, TPS holders, F-1 students, and DACA recipients — while excluding visa categories tied to a specific employer, such as H-1B, J-1, or TN. However, many jurisdictions like [Honolulu](#) and [Kauai](#) limit eligibility to U.S. citizens, LPRs, and certain noncitizen nationals (such as individuals born in American Samoa and Swains Island). Hawaii's approach is more flexible than a strict LPR requirement but more restrictive than broad work-authorization models.

States Requiring LPR Status (Green Card Holders)

North Dakota

North Dakota [allows](#) U.S. citizens and LPRs to work as police officers. Several municipal police departments permit LPR hiring, such as the [Bismarck Police Department](#). However, some statewide law enforcement agencies, such as the [North Dakota Highway Patrol](#) require U.S. citizenship for trooper positions.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma [follows](#) the same rule permitting U.S. citizens and LPRs to work as police officers. However, major cities such as [Oklahoma City](#) and [Tulsa](#) require citizenship. Nevertheless, some municipalities like [Norman](#) and [Glenpool](#) do allow LPRs to be hired as police officers.

Washington, D.C.

The Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia [accepts](#) applications from U.S. citizens and LPRs pursuant to policy changes implemented following enactment of the [District's Comprehensive Policing and Justice Reform Amendment Act of 2022](#). Although Congress voted in 2023 to overturn that law, the effort was [blocked](#) by a presidential veto, allowing the noncitizen hiring provision to remain in effect. More

recently, the U.S. House of Representatives has again [passed](#) legislation to repeal the Act, and future federal action could reverse the District's current eligibility standards.

Utah

Utah [allows](#) citizens and LPRs who have lived in the U.S. for at least five years to work as police officers. For instance, the [Salt Lake City Police Department](#) accepts applications from U.S. citizens and LPRs. There are other municipalities, however, that only consider applications from U.S. citizens, such as [Richfield](#) and [Ogden](#).

State Allowing DACA Recipients

Washington State

Washington State [mandates](#) that law enforcement applicants be U.S. citizens, LPRs, or DACA recipients. In that regard, the [Seattle Police Department](#) accepts applications from DACA recipients.

States Allowing LPRs with Military Service

Maryland

Maryland generally requires police officers to have U.S. citizenship, but [also permits](#) (but does not require) jurisdictions to hire LPRs [honorably discharged](#) from the U.S. military. Consistent with state law, jurisdictions vary as to whether they consider honorably discharged LPR applicants. For example, [Rockville](#) accepts such applications, while [Havre de Grace](#) only accepts citizen applications.

Tennessee

Tennessee maintains a citizenship requirement but [allows](#) LPR U.S. military veterans who were honorably discharged to apply for law enforcement positions. The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, for instance, is following the state guidance and [accepting](#) applications from LPRs honorably discharged from the U.S. military.

States with Unclear or Conflicting Requirements

Massachusetts

The rules in Massachusetts around noncitizens working as police officers are complicated and [conflicting](#). There are some municipalities in Massachusetts that allow legal permanent residents to [serve](#) as police officers, such as Cambridge, New Bedford, Worcester, and Fall River, but others – including the Massachusetts State Police – require candidates to possess U.S. citizenship.

States with Waivers

Connecticut

Connecticut [allows](#) U.S. citizens and LPRs to serve as police officers, in accordance with 2020 guidance issued by the Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) Council, the Connecticut state agency that oversees state law enforcement training and credentialing. In limited circumstances, POST may issue waivers departing from this requirement to permit the consideration and hiring of qualified DACA recipients. Some Connecticut municipalities have started to accept applications from DACA recipients after obtaining the necessary waivers from POST, such as [Willimantic](#), [Norwalk](#), and [Bridgeport](#).

Virginia

Virginia requires U.S. citizenship but allows police chiefs to waive this requirement for “good cause,” creating a narrow pathway for noncitizen applicants. For example, the [Charlottesville Police Department](#) accepts applications from U.S. citizens or permanent residents — provided the candidate obtains a waiver from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. However, other municipalities like [Hampton](#) and [Newport News](#) mandate U.S. citizenship for police officers.

In 2024, the Virginia General Assembly [passed](#) two bills that would have expanded eligibility for law enforcement positions by expressly permitting the hiring of lawful permanent residents and DACA recipients statewide. Governor Glenn Youngkin [vetoed](#) both measures, maintaining the existing citizenship requirement and waiver-based approach, but the bills could be reintroduced in future legislative sessions.

Conclusion

As law enforcement agencies continue to confront persistent staffing shortages, an increasing number of states and municipalities are reexamining long-standing citizenship requirements. While the national landscape remains uneven, the trend toward allowing LPRs and other work-authorized individuals like Dreamers to serve reflects a growing recognition of the need to widen applicant pools without compromising professional standards. Adoption of such policy changes at the state and local levels ensures that departments can fully access this expanded pool of qualified candidates while promoting consistency, transparency, and public trust.

Table: Eligibility of Noncitizens to Serve as Law Enforcement Officers in U.S. Jurisdictions (2025)

State / Jurisdiction	Statewide Eligibility Standard	LPRs Eligible?	Work-Authorized Noncitizens Eligible?	DACA Recipients Eligible?	Notable Local Variations / Notes
California	Legal work authorization permitted	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Some large cities (e.g., San Diego) restrict hiring to citizens and LPRs
Colorado	No citizenship requirement	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Denver allows work-authorized applicants including DACA; Aurora & Boulder limit to LPRs; El Paso County requires citizenship
Connecticut	Citizens or LPRs; waivers possible	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Yes (by waiver)	POST may grant waivers; Willimantic, Norwalk & Bridgeport accept DACA recipients
Hawaii	LPRs or eligible for “unrestricted employment”	✓ Yes	Limited (unrestricted only)	✓ Yes (if EAD qualifies)	Honolulu & Kauai restrict to citizens, LPRs, and certain U.S. nationals
Illinois	Citizens or legally work-authorized (2023 law)	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Local option preserved; Chicago & Champaign allow work-authorized applicants
Maine	Legal work authorization permitted	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Maine State Police & Portland PD require LPRs; some local departments accept work-authorized applicants
Maryland	Citizens; LPRs allowed only if honorably discharged veterans	✓ Yes (veterans only)	✗ No	✗ No	Rockville accepts LPR veterans; Havre de Grace requires citizenship
Massachusetts	Unclear / conflicting	✓ Yes (some localities)	✗ No	✗ No	Cambridge, New Bedford, Worcester & Fall River allow

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					LPRs; State Police require citizenship
New Mexico	Citizens or legally work-authorized (2025 law)	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Localities may impose stricter rules; Gallup & Alamogordo require citizenship
North Dakota	Citizens or LPRs	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	Many municipal PDs allow LPRs; ND Highway Patrol requires citizenship
Oklahoma	Citizens or LPRs	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	Oklahoma City & Tulsa require citizenship; Norman & Glenpool allow LPRs
Tennessee	Citizens; LPRs allowed only if honorably discharged veterans	✓ Yes (veterans only)	✗ No	✗ No	Nashville follows veteran LPR exception
Utah	Citizens or LPRs (5 years U.S. residence)	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	Salt Lake City accepts LPRs; Richfield & Ogden require citizenship
Vermont	No citizenship requirement	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Possibly	Burlington permits citizens and LPRs
Virginia	Citizenship required; waivers for “good cause”	✓ Yes (with waiver)	✗ No	✗ No	Charlottesville accepts LPRs w/ waiver; Hampton & Newport News require citizenship; 2024 expansion bills vetoed
Washington (State)	Citizens, LPRs, or DACA recipients	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Yes	Seattle PD accepts DACA recipients

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Washington, D.C.	Citizens or LPRs (post-2022 reform)	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	Policy tied to 2022 Act; congressional repeal efforts ongoing
West Virginia	No citizenship requirement	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Possibly	Major cities (Huntington, Morgantown, Wheeling) require citizenship