

THE ANDZNAGIR

News for the American citizen community in Armenia

ISSUE 5: OCTOBER 2016



For further information:

- See the [State Department's travel website](#) for the [Worldwide Caution](#), Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and [Country Information for Armenia](#).
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Contact the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, Armenia, located at 1 American Avenue, at tel. (374-10) 46-47-00 and fax (374 10) 46-47-42, Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. After-hours emergency number for U.S. citizens is (374-10) 49-44-44. Our email address is ACS.Yerevan@state.gov.

Be an absentee voter, not an absentee citizen!

The presidential election is on November 8: make sure your voice is heard! All American citizens overseas are entitled to cast a ballot by mail. If you have not already registered to vote and requested an absentee ballot through the county registrar of voters where you live in the U.S., come to the embassy right away to fill in a federal postcard, which we will send back postage-free, to complete these steps. Depending on where you live, it may not be too late! California voters, for instance, may register up until October 24, may request to receive ballots by email, and may return ballots by fax, meaning that it is still possible for them to take part in the election. Answers to all your voting questions can be found at www.fvap.org, or you can write us at ACS with any questions you might have.



The U.S. Embassy will be closed for the following upcoming holidays—November 11 (U.S. Veterans' Day), November 24 (U.S. Thanksgiving), December 26 (Christmas).

ACS insight of the quarter

“I have been arrested in Armenia.” Or “I’m having troubles with the neighbors at my family home in the village.” Or “I’ve been cheated by a business and I wish to sue.”



WHAT CAN THE U.S. EMBASSY DO TO ASSIST ME? The answer is: not very much. We can offer you a sympathetic ear and a list of English-speaking attorneys—and if it is a criminal matter, we can monitor your case and visit you in jail to ensure that you receive fair and humane treatment—but the embassy does not have the ability, or the right, to intervene in the criminal or civil legal affairs of Armenia. All of the situations mentioned above must be handled by the Armenian authorities, and when you are in Armenia, you must abide by Armenian laws and procedures regardless of your citizenship. Please do not expect the Embassy to make statements on your behalf, to demand the actions you desire from local authorities or to secure your release from jail. The U.S. cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other sovereign nations, even to benefit its citizens: that is the bottom line.

Did you know that the embassy now offers three RSS feeds to help you keep abreast of our news and announcements? To sign up, go to armenia.usembassy.gov/rss_news.html .

Visa question of the quarter

I am an American, and I wrote a letter inviting my relative to visit me in the U.S., and yet he was denied a tourist visa! I am a law-abiding, tax-

paying citizen. Don’t I have the right to invite my relatives to visit me? The simple answer is that the only factor visa officers may use in determining who will receive a tourist visa is the visa *applicant’s* ties to Armenia. In fact, American citizens do *not* have a right to receive whomever they wish as guests in the U.S. They may write invitation letters or make personal guarantees that the visitor will return to Armenia, but legally these things cannot be taken into account when a visa officer is making a decision. The personal qualifications of the person in the U.S. making the invitation are similarly irrelevant. In addition, the law grants no humanitarian exceptions. Visa officers may sympathize with applicants whose relatives are sick in the U.S. but may not take this reason for travel into account. Under the law, the only question visa officers may ask themselves is: am I convinced that this applicant will return to their home country after a short visit to the U.S.? If they are not convinced, they must deny the visa, and that’s the end of the story.



New rules for passport applications

Please note these two new rules when it comes time for you to renew your passport or those of your children: 1) You may no longer wear your eyeglasses when you have your passport photos taken. (And please remember to bring the correct 5cm x 5cm “American” size to save yourself the trouble of being sent away to have new ones taken!). 2) You must provide a social security number on the application form or sign a statement under penalty of perjury that you do not (or your child does not) have one. **ACS staff are not permitted to search records for your social security number.**



FOCUS ON: ARTIFICIAL REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY (ART) AND U.S. CITIZENSHIP

The ART industry in Armenia is expanding rapidly, and more and more couples are coming from the United States to take advantage of the services here, where costs are considerably cheaper. However, as two recent heartbreaking cases in our office have shown, there are risks involved when it comes to obtaining American citizenship for children conceived using ART and carried by a surrogate. The key point to keep in mind for American parents using ART in Armenia is that, under U.S. law, they may only transmit their American citizenship to the child if there is a biological/genetic relationship between that child and one or both of the parents. If donor material is used to replace both parents' contributions, or if a mistake is made and an embryo is implanted that belongs to another couple, the resulting child, while legally theirs under Armenian law, cannot become a U.S. citizen. Since the Armenian birth certificate from ZAKS does not establish a biological relationship—the fertility clinic does not have to prove this for the parents to register the birth—we generally require families who have used ART to undergo DNA testing before U.S. citizenship can be adjudicated. Thus, it is vital that all American couples considering the use of ART in Armenia carefully research local fertility clinics and their procedures, scrutinize the agreements they are signing, communicate that donor eggs and sperm may not both be used, and think through what they will do if the child they produce turns out not to be genetically theirs. There are other means of taking your non-biological children to the United States, but they are considerably longer and more complicated than obtaining U.S. citizenship.

NOTE ABOUT: Health coverage while in Armenia

Americans who have Medicare coverage back in the U.S.: we remind you that this program provides no benefits outside the country, and any medical bills you incur while in Armenia will have to be paid by you. Those of you with private medical insurance may encounter the same issue. Armenian hospitals generally expect to be reimbursed for services up front: you will not be permitted to leave the country and pay the bill once you get home. The embassy cannot provide financial assistance to those who find they cannot pay their medical bills. We strongly encourage all visitors to Armenia to obtain a private travel insurance policy that will cover medical costs, as well as fees for medevac flights should a serious illness or injury require evacuation back to the U.S.

