

Acquiring an Apostille from your State Government (Secretary of State) [and/or Authentication from the Federal Government (U.S. Dept. of State)]

What it is: One of functions of state and federal government is to authenticate documents for recognition and travel purposes. (For example birth certificates) In 1961 the Hague Convention made the recognition of documents between differing countries a very easy process for countries that are members of the Hague Convention (Nearly all European and “stable” governments are members of the Hague Convention: e.g. England, Spain, France, Mexico, etc.) The name of the authentication you need to acquire from the state is called an **Apostille** (I realize the words are confusing but think of this as a special or specific form of authentication). This is a form of *state governmental* authentication of a document such as for birth certificate, diploma, employment letter, etc. This is done on the state level through your state’s Secretary of State office. For most purposes, this step is all that is needed as the Federal government recognizes this state-government-issued **Apostille**; i.e. no Federal **authentication** is needed. However, you are always free to **authenticate** your Apostille documents “Federally” if you so choose via application for authentication through the U.S. Dept. of State. This could be used to either: (a) Further substantiate your claim, or (b) be used for a country that is *NOT* a member of the Hague Convention (e.g. Egypt)

How it Works: The authentication process works in steps from the lowest levels of government to the highest. This goes in the following order: (a) You sign the citizenship document and a **notary** witnesses the signature (b) The County Clerk of Courts (usually must be in same county as Notary as on her seal) **certifies** the document, (c) These get forwarded to the Secretary of State for the **Apostille** along with a cover letter stating country of travel. They return the document with the Apostille letter attached (d) If desired or needed (for travel to non-Hague country) you forward all these to the Federal government for **Federal Authentication and Acknowledgement**.

The Steps: In order, the steps are (1) **Notary** witness of signature, (2) **Certification** by state County Clerk, (3) **Apostille** issued by State government (i.e. the state Secretary of State) (4) **Federal Authentication and Acknowledgement** by the Federal government (U.S. Dept. of State) **IF you desire**. So the key phrase you need to remember when you walk into the county clerk’s office is this: “I want my signature **Notarized** on some citizenship papers. Then I want **Certification** of my **Notarized** citizenship document for the purposes of acquiring an **Apostille** from the state”.

Easy Step-by-Step Process:

- (1) Call up your local County Clerk’s Office and ask if they have a notary on staff. Most do and this will save you one step. (If not, you’ll most likely need to find a notary **in the county** of your county clerk’s office. Then you’ll take the document to the county clerk’s office.)
- (2) Take your unsigned (or signed/notarized if you acquired Notary witness elsewhere) **Affidavit (Clarification of Citizenship)** from your Administrative Process to the county clerk’s office with some form of picture ID. (Driver’s license). Tell them you are intending to apply to the State government for an Apostille for travel to a Hague convention country and you need some citizenship papers **notarized** and **certified**. They will **notarize** your signature after you sign

- (in front of them) the last page. They will then **certify** your document. This can take various forms but usually is a separate piece of paper with a Seal on it. (For example, Ohio calls it a Certificate of Official Character. This basically certifies the Notary is ok). If they get confused, remember your *key phrase*, “I want my signature **Notarized** on some citizenship papers. Then I want **Certification** of my **Notarized** citizenship document for the purposes of acquiring an **Apostille** from the state”.
- (3) Take the **Notarized** Affidavit along with the **Certification** document and make a couple copies for your own records. Next look up on the web for your state’s Secretary of State. Do a search on **Apostille** or Certification of Documents. Follow their instructions for acquiring an **Apostille**. (In most states this can be done either in person or by mail.) You will need to submit the originals (with the seals) of your **notarized affidavit** and **Certification** along with a cover letter requesting the **Apostille** and stating the country of travel. (For example use Spain-- as it’s a *member* of the Hague convention). The typical fee is \$5. Many states require the inclusion of a S.A.S.E. for return of your documents. When they return your documents make a copy of the Apostille and other documents if you haven’t done so already. You’ll need to retain these for future reference and I would suggest keeping the original along with your other papers in a safe place. An extra copy at another location is a good idea too.
- (4) If you want to obtain *Federal* recognition of your Apostille you can do so through the U.S. State Departments program called **authentication**. You will need to write them a letter stating you want **Federal Authentication and Acknowledgement** of your document for the purposes of travel to (e.g. Egypt) a *non-member* of the Hague Convention. The steps are available from the U.S. governments web site at www.state.gov/m/a/auth/ or you can use the steps below:

Please note the following information must be obtained before the authentication process can begin.

1. Your citizenship paper Signed before a **notary** public.
2. **Certified** by the clerk of Court of the County in which the document is commissioned.*
3. Certified by the Secretary of State of the State in which the document is executed. (i.e. the **Apostille**)
4. All seals and signatures must be originals.
5. All dates must follow in chronological order on all certifications.
6. All documents in foreign text must be accompanied with a certified (notarized) English translation.
7. Whenever a copy (if acceptable) is used, it must include a statement that it is a true and accurate copy.
8. Foreign governments require the U.S. Department of State to authenticate documents in order for the document to be considered legal. Therefore, it is suggested that you contact the embassy of the particular country to determine what documents are needed for transactions.
9. Include **\$5** payment made payable to **U.S. Department of State** and include a “sufficient size” SASE.

10. If you mail these by regular mail they will be delayed due to “terrorist screening”; a courier such as Fed-X will avoid this step.

*Item 2 may be omitted if the authority in item 3 will certify directly to the notary.

A request for authentication services under 22 CFR, Part 131, should include the *reason for authentication* and the *name of the country* (e.g. “I intend to travel to Egypt”) where the document will be used. Contact and **mailing address** information is below.

Authentications Office (A/OPR/GSM/AUTH)
518 23rd Street, N.W.
State Annex 1
Washington, DC 20037
Tel: 202 647-5002
TDD: 202 663-3468
1 800 688-9889
Fax: 202 663-3636

or you can email us at AOPRGSMAUTH@STATE.GOV.

For information about American citizens who were born, married, or deceased abroad, contact the [Passport Office](#), U.S. Department of State, 1111 19th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20520, Tel. 202-955-0307. Copies of consular reports of birth, marriage, and deaths may be obtained from this office. *You can call them with any question at 800 688-9889 (and enter 4, then 4, then 2 at each voice prompt)*

Note: Attached are the two sample cover letters; the first is for the state level and the second is for the U.S. Government authentication-- if desired or needed.

You R. Name

44 Anyplace Street* Anyplace, State[zipcode]

Date

Office of the Secretary of State
Manager, Apostille Section
City, State

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter has been written to request an authentication in the form of an **Apostille**. Attached is my **Notarized Affidavit** and supporting documentation with County Clerk **Certification** pertaining to the request for the **Apostille**. I am considering travel in Spain and Mexico and I am aware that these countries are signatories to the Hague Convention.

The required \$?? charge for this service is provided. I have enclosed a SASE for return of the documents.

Please return the **Apostille and Affidavit documents**, once these have been recorded by the Secretary of State's Office, to my address at the top of this letter. I will need to later file this document with Colin Powell, United States Secretary of State, for Federal Acknowledgement by his office.

Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

You R. Name

You R. Name

44 Anyplace Street* Anyplace, State[zipcode]

Date

Authentications Office (A/OPR/GSM/AUTH)
518 23rd Street, N.W.
State Annex 1
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter has been written to request **Federal Authentication and Acknowledgement** of documents that have been **signed, notarized, certified** (by the county clerk of the my state), and authenticated via my state **Apostille**. Attached are these documents pertaining to the request for **Federal Authentication and Acknowledgement**. I am considering travel to Egypt and I am aware that this country is not a signatory to the Hague Convention.

The required \$5 charge for this service is provided. I have enclosed a SASE for return of the documents.

Please return the *original* **signed and notarized document, certification document, and Apostille**, with your **Federal Authentication** once these have been recorded by your office, to my address at the top of this letter. I will need to retain these documents for any needed presentation to embassy personnel..

Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

You R. Name

