

## A Case Study

When he was 14, our client “Amahl” was brought to the United States from a refugee camp in Sierra Leone to speak at an international conference about his experience as a child soldier. Although he had no family or friends in the United States, he decided to stay rather than return to the country where he had witnessed the murder of his parents and siblings and then endured torture and deprivation while living under the control of the insurgents who abducted him at age five. Somehow, he made a connection with Human Rights First, which contacted Lowenstein to represent him. The firm secured a green card for Amahl in 2010, when he was 17.

Amahl stayed in touch with his legal team during the following years. He settled in with his adoptive family, finished high school, and attended college, graduating with a degree in international relations. All the while, he continued his work with various international organizations to promote peace and education in the developing world.

Amahl waited the required five years before filing a naturalization petition in 2015. After experiencing delays in the adjudication of his petition and enduring two hostile interviews, he approached the firm to represent him again. In July 2017, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) denied the petition and concluded that Amahl’s green card had been improperly issued back in 2010 because he had engaged in “terrorist activity” as a child soldier between the ages of five and nine. “USCIS recognizes,” the decision reads, “that you engaged in terrorist activity with the RUF [Revolutionary United Front] under duress, and that you believed you would have been killed if you did not follow orders.” Nevertheless, the government refused to waive the “terrorism bar” to Amahl’s naturalization.

Together with the legal department at **Merck**, the firm is appealing this decision.

Excerpted from the Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest’s 2017 *Pro Bono Report*.