For Immediate Release: May 21, 2020
Media Contact: Rekha Radhakrishnan, 832-628-2312 rradhakrishnan@publiccounsel.org

FEDERAL LAWSUIT FILED TO GET DEPORTED VETERAN ACCESS TO NATURALIZATION INTERVIEW

Marine officer who served during Persian Gulf Conflict is fighting to reunite with his partner and children

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS – May 21, 2020 – This morning Public Counsel and Latham & Watkins filed a lawsuit against the federal government in the Northern District of Illinois on behalf of Roman Sabal, a deported United States Marine Corps veteran who is eligible to become a U.S. citizen, but who has been blocked from completing the process by the federal government. Sabal’s efforts to become a citizen have spanned decades.

Because Sabal was an active-duty marine who served honorably during a designated period of hostilities, he is eligible to become a naturalized U.S. citizen under the Immigration and Nationality Act. However, over the course of 25 years, he has encountered numerous difficulties obtaining citizenship including, most recently, the government scheduled naturalization interviews in the U.S., which are impossible for him to attend because he is not allowed to enter the U.S. He is now in the midst of his third application for citizenship, a process that has gone on for 16 months.

“Sergeant Roman Sabal is legally entitled to naturalize as a U.S. citizen because of his honorable military service. USCIS’s complete failure to provide Roman with a naturalization interview that he can actually attend is unjust and baffling,” said Helen Boyer, staff attorney at Public Counsel. “He—like all deported veterans—deserves better.”

Roman Sabal was born in Belize in 1961 and served in the Belize Defense Force before entering the United States on a visa with plans to join the U.S. Marine Corps. During his time in the Marine Corps, Sabal was deployed overseas 3 times, rising to the rank of sergeant. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Navy Unit Commendation among other awards. In addition to this service, Sabal also built a family in the U.S. with his long-term partner of nearly 25 years who is a U.S. citizen. Together they have two children who are also U.S. citizens. However, because of a removal order entered against him in 2008 for failure to appear at an immigration court hearing, Sabal has not been able to return to live with his partner or children in the United States for nearly 12 years.

“I have been fighting for my U.S. citizenship for almost three decades. All I want is to be with my family in the country I love,” said Sabal. “I miss them so very much.”
The lawsuit highlights numerous issues with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service’s handling of Sabal’s naturalization, including the agency’s failure to timely schedule an interview at a place—for example, a port of entry—that would allow a deported veteran like Sabal to attend. The lawsuit also underscores the failure of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to grant him humanitarian parole so he can enter the U.S. for the interviews USCIS has scheduled for him. Without these options, Sabal remains locked in a bureaucratic circle that prevents him from reuniting with his family and enjoying the full breadth of rights of U.S. citizenship, rights promised to him by the U.S. government through his military service.

“The Immigration and Nationality Act provides veterans like Sergeant Sabal with a clear path to citizenship,” said Robert Collins, a partner at Latham & Watkins. “The act allows people who have honorably served the United States to apply for citizenship, and absolutely should apply to Sergeant Sabal.”

About Public Counsel

Public Counsel is the nation’s largest not-for-profit law firm of its kind – filing groundbreaking civil rights litigation, advancing justice through legislative and policy advocacy, and providing direct legal services that help tens of thousands of low-income people every year in California and across the nation.

About Latham & Watkins

Latham & Watkins delivers innovative solutions to complex legal and business challenges around the world. From a global platform, our lawyers advise clients on market-shaping transactions, high-stakes litigation and trials, and sophisticated regulatory matters. Latham is one of the world’s largest providers of pro bono services, steadfastly supports initiatives designed to advance diversity within the firm and the legal profession, and is committed to exploring and promoting environmental sustainability.