



# States prepare to implement new driver's license standards

by *Tim Anderson*

New federal standards that aim to improve the security and integrity of state driver's license and identification processes also could impose a costly burden on states, some elected and administrative officials say.

Signed by President George Bush in May, the Real ID Act will not be fully in place until 2008. Over the next three years, state motor vehicle administrators will have the task of reviewing details of the new law and preparing for its implementation.

"Right now, it's too early to tell exactly what the impact is going to be, both in terms of costs and services," says Randy Nehrt, deputy press secretary for the Illinois secretary of state's office.

Kelly Chesney, spokeswoman for the Michigan secretary of state's office, agrees.

"We certainly support the concept of advancing homeland security and want to be a part of it," Chesney says. "There are some unanswered questions [about the act]. We're just beginning to review it."

Concerns about certain provisions in the measure led several state advocacy organizations, including The Council of State Governments, to oppose it.

"[Real ID] would impose technological standards and verification procedures on states, many of which are beyond the current capacity of even the federal government," the organizations wrote in a letter earlier this year to congressional leaders.

"Moreover, the cost of implementing such standards and verification procedures for the 220 million driver's licenses issued by states represents a massive unfunded federal mandate."

The exact cost on states is not known. Supporters have put the price tag at about \$100 million, while others have said that figure is low.

For their driver's licenses and identification cards to be recognized by the federal government, states will have to employ common machine-readable and facial-image technologies. They also must enter into a new interstate driver's license compact that links motor vehicle databases. As a result, states will share data on the driving histories of individuals (moving violations, suspensions, etc.) and the identifying information collected for driver's license and ID cards.

Under Real ID, four types of identification will be required before a state can issue licenses:

- photo identification (though non-photo ID will be acceptable if it includes the person's full legal name and date of birth);

- a birth certificate or other documentation showing the person's date of birth;

- proof of the person's Social Security account number or verification that the person is not eligible for one; and

- documentation showing the person's name and address of principal residence.

"How are we going to verify birth certificates? How are we going to verify proofs of residency?" Nehrt says. "Those are some questions that are going to have to be answered as we move forward in this process."

One concern is that the additional documentation requirements and stricter verification process could cause delays, and longer lines, at motor vehicle facilities.

"We need to make sure these changes don't hinder customer service," Chesney says.

New national standards for driver's licenses were among the recommendations made by the federal 9/11 Commission. Supporters say Real ID will help disrupt the movement of terrorists, including the boarding of commercial airplanes. Other provisions of the act require states to confirm that visas for foreign visitors are valid and that these visitors' temporary licenses expire at the same time their visas do. Real ID also creates more obstacles for immigrants seeking asylum. 🚩



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