

Sorting out the real facts of the REAL ID Act

Written by By Patricia A. Lundstrom, State Representative, District 9
Friday, 26 February 2016 03:02

One of the major accomplishments of the 2016 legislative session was the approval of a compromise to bring New Mexico into compliance with the federal REAL ID Act of 2005. This means that you can keep using your driver's license to board an airplane and that you'll soon be able to resume using your license to enter military bases.

There's been a lot of misinformation surrounding the compromise, but it really boils down to two things.

First, the legislation creates a REAL ID-compliant driver's license that citizens and others in the country legally can get later this year. No one will be required to get the new license and, even if you want one, you won't have to get one for several years. Once our plan is approved by the federal government, which is expected, you'll be able to use your current driver's license to board airplanes either until it expires or until October 1, 2020, whichever comes first.

Citizens who want a REAL ID driver's license must provide the state with a birth certificate or passport and social security card or W-2 form along with other information.

Second, undocumented immigrants can get a driving authorization card, which will allow them to legally drive throughout the United States but will not allow them to board an airplane or enter a federal facility. The driving authorization card will be valid initially for two years but can be renewed for four years. Citizens who prefer to get the driving authorization card rather than the REAL ID driver's license will have the choice to do so.

Undocumented immigrants who don't currently have a license must be fingerprinted and won't be eligible for a driving authorization card if they have any outstanding arrest warrants or have used aliases to get other documents.

The state Motor Vehicle Division will be providing more information about what's required to get a REAL ID driver's license or a driving authorization card. For now, rest assured that the driver's license in your wallet will still be valid for boarding an airplane.

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