REAL ID Act legislation supported by Secretary White passes Senate committee

February 9 2017 8:20 AM



Bill allows customers to choose between REAL ID-compliant and noncompliant cards

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White announced that REAL ID Act legislation, which authorizes the Secretary of State's office to offer customers the option to obtain either a REAL ID-compliant driver's license/identification card (DL/ID) or a noncompliant DL /ID, passed the Senate Executive Committee today. Illinois is currently REAL ID compliant through an extension granted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in recognition of the state's recent improvements to the issuance process and security upgrades to the DL/ID design.

“This legislation gives customers the right to choose between applying for a REAL ID-compliant DL/ID and a noncompliant DL/ID,” said White. “If you are someone who doesn’t use air travel or have a reason to visit a federal facility or military base, or prefer to use a U.S. passport which itself is considered REAL ID compliant, the noncompliant card may be a viable option.”

Senate Bill 674, which now goes to the full Senate for consideration, is sponsored by state Sen. Iris Martinez (D-Chicago) and is designed to give the public the right to choose between a REAL ID-compliant card and a noncompliant card, similar to other states that have been declared REAL ID compliant by DHS.

The documents required to obtain a REAL ID-compliant card are more extensive than those required for a noncompliant card, such as showing identity and establishing legal presence. The main documents required to satisfy these federal requirements are U.S. passports, certified copies of birth certificates or federally-mandated immigration documents. The requirements to present these additional documents will apply to new applicants and to customers who have a current noncompliant DL/ID and choose to obtain a REAL ID-compliant card.

If customers do not wish to obtain the REAL ID-compliant card, they do not need to bring in additional documentation. Noncompliant cards will be marked “Not for Federal Identification.” According to the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA), individuals with noncompliant DL/IDs will be required to present an alternative to a REAL ID-compliant DL/ID, such as a U.S. passport which itself is considered REAL ID compliant, to board an airplane or gain access to a military or federal facility.

Several states that have achieved full REAL ID compliance offer the public the choice between REAL ID-compliant and noncompliant cards. In Wisconsin, only 22 percent of citizens have chosen to apply for the REAL ID-compliant card. According to Wisconsin officials, many citizens who do not fly or have a reason to visit federal facilities or military bases have opted for the noncompliant card. This is also true in other states, such as Arizona, Nevada and West Virginia, that offer the two options.

The REAL ID Act is a federal mandate by DHS that sets standards for state-issued DL /IDs and prohibits federal agencies from accepting DL/IDs from states that do not meet the standards. Last summer, DHS acknowledged that the changes Illinois made to the issuance process and card design helped the state meet REAL ID standards. These changes produce a more secure driver’s license and identification card, according to DHS.

White noted DHS has granted Illinois an extension of time through October of this year to become fully REAL ID compliant. In addition, DHS stated there will be no security changes at airports before Jan. 22, 2018. However after this date, DHS clarified that citizens from states that are noncompliant and have not received an extension of time to become compliant will not be allowed to board airplanes unless they present an alternative acceptable document such as a U.S. passport, which itself is considered a REAL ID-compliant document. If necessary, Illinois still has the option of applying for another compliance extension for 2018.

According to DHS documents, the Secretary of State has satisfied approximately 90 percent of the REAL ID requirements. The office is currently working on the remaining 10 percent that includes: procuring the funding to remodel and reconfigure the state's Driver Services facilities, moving the camera function to the front of the process and initiating an electronic verification procedure with the federal government to verify required identity documents, such as a birth certificate or a U.S. passport.