

Trump Announces REAL ID Compliance Deadline Postponed Due to COVID-19

On March 23, 2020, President Trump announced that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) would delay the October 1, 2020, deadline for compliance with the REAL ID Act of 2005. Under the REAL ID Act, federal agencies may not accept state-issued driver's licenses or ID cards for "official purposes" — which includes for clearance through TSA security checkpoints at airports — unless those documents meet certain minimum requirements.

The compliance date was postponed at a time of nationwide social distancing due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Because REAL IDs may only be obtained in-person at DMV offices, state and federal officials were concerned about a potential congregation of travelers rushing to obtain compliant licenses ahead of the October deadline. On March 26, 2020, DHS announced that it is extending the enforcement deadline by one year until October 1, 2021.

The postponement is welcome news for U.S. airlines and the U.S. travel industry, which had grown increasingly concerned (well before COVID-19) that a significant number of Americans had not yet obtained a REAL ID and, therefore, would be unable to use their driver's licenses at a TSA checkpoint to travel by air starting in October. As recently as February 28, 2020, DHS indicated that only 34 percent of state-issued driver's licenses and ID cards were REAL ID-compliant.

Under the previous timeframe, passengers who arrived at a U.S. airport on or after October 1, 2020, would need to present a REAL ID-compliant license or an alternative acceptable document, such as a passport, to proceed through the TSA checkpoint. Those who did not would likely be turned away and unable to travel until they obtained TSA-acceptable identification, leading to significant disruptions for passengers and airlines.



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