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**REAL ID: Getting Ready in Virginia
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Why REAL ID?

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me here to talk about an important federal law impacting most all Virginians and drivers across the nation.

At one time, a Virginia driver license was simply a permit to operate a vehicle on public roads. The driver's license has evolved to the basic form of identification in our country. It is now one of the keys to functioning in American society. You need one to board an airplane, to enter a federal building and to open a bank account. Particularly in the aftermath of the September eleventh attacks, there has been a heightened awareness of the importance of driver's license security.

Virginia moved to improve security over the drivers licensing process. The General Assembly passed Virginia's "Legal Presence" law in 2003. DMV has, with the General Assembly's support, been working on a new driver's license process where by driver's licenses and ID cards will be produced in a central location and mailed to customers. DMV has tightened many policies and internal controls. All these efforts were taken to improve security.

While Virginia made strides in improving driver's license issuance, the federal government saw the need to improve the integrity and security of state-issued driver licenses and identification cards nationwide.

The REAL ID Act was passed by Congress in 2005 and was slated for implementation in May 2008. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security released final federal regulations for REAL ID last January.

Virginia, along with all other states in the country, was granted an extension until December 2009 to implement REAL ID. That means your current driver's license can still be used for federal purposes, such as boarding an airplane or accessing a federal facility.

What is REAL ID?

REAL ID establishes national, minimum standards for the issuance of driver's licenses and ID cards, which include

- information and security features incorporated into each card
- applicant's proof of identity and U.S. citizenship status, and verification of the documents the customer submits as proof
- security standards for DMV employees who issue licenses and ID cards

Privacy of Records

Protecting personal identity information is an issue DMV takes very seriously. REAL ID requires all DMVs to develop a security plan to further protect personal information, including a number of privacy and security elements.

All Virginia DMV employees involved in the issuance of driver's licenses and ID cards will go through criminal background checks, and they must complete fraudulent document recognition training and security awareness training.

REAL ID requires that all data and systems be standardized across a large network, linking states and the federal government together. However, it is important to note that states will maintain ownership of this customer data.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, this network will ensure that people applying for a REAL ID are who they say they are, but the federal government will not gain greater access to DMV information as a result. Only authorized DMV officials and law enforcement will have access to our records.

As you know, Virginia has some of the strictest privacy laws in the nation. As custodians of these records, we take privacy very seriously. By law, personal information, such as information from driver or vehicle records, is not public. DMV upholds these laws and is vigilant in protecting records.

Implementation requirements

The next chapter in this story will come when DMVs across the nation begin issuing REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses and ID cards.

Since regulations were released last January, we've been working on what is expected of the states, and what we'll all need to do to comply.

Here are some of the changes under REAL ID:

- Every Virginian applying for or renewing a driver's license or ID card will need to visit a DMV customer service center.
- Some of the databases required to verify submitted documents exist today, and some are still being formulated.
- DMV will be required to scan and store copies of all of those documents.

The result is a dramatic change to the Virginia DMV service model. Customers should expect longer transaction and wait times due to an increase in customers, document verification and scanning.

Getting the word out

Another challenge is to make sure Virginians are aware of all the changes coming down the pike. A few of our state's newspapers and television stations have provided coverage of REAL ID.

Even so, I think the message has failed to connect with most Virginians.

The reason?

One, it's still more than a year away, and....

Two, the real story hasn't been fully told yet. That's the potential anger that the average DMV customer will feel when they realize the changes that will take place.

One newsmagazine hit the nail on the head, when it talked about "red-blooded Americans leaping over DMV counters in sheer rage."

The impact on DMV customers will be significant -- longer lines, and difficulty in the renewal process for driver's licenses and ID cards. It will be much more like the process of getting a passport.

We believe full compliance with REAL ID will increase wait times in Virginia DMV offices significantly, by as much as 200 percent.

Licensing transactions that used to be completed on the same visit will now take days or even weeks to finish.

DMV is preparing for REAL ID

We, at the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, are readying ourselves for the challenge ahead. DMV is moving forward with a strategy to better position Virginia when this law takes effect.

First, we had to look at the cost. It's an expensive plan to implement. Of the total cost for REAL ID, DMV will receive only \$2.6 million from the federal government. The \$2.6 million federal grant will cover peripheral equipment needed in our offices to carry out the law. The Virginia General Assembly approved \$5.2 million.

The \$5.2 million is an annual, recurring cost. This money will be used for an estimated 100 additional staff, required information technology, and public awareness and education.

In order to deal with the increased REAL ID-related customer traffic in our customer service centers, DMV is accelerating efforts to divert routine vehicle-related work from our customer service centers to "preferred services" or service options such as mail, phone and the Internet. You may be familiar with a new law that took effect July 1 that encourages Virginians to renew their vehicle registrations online to receive a \$1 discount. If customers renew their decals at a full-service DMV office, a \$5 fee is added.

We have also aggressively added resources we call "DMV Select" partners. These are local government offices and private contractors who handle a variety of vehicle and other non-driver DMV work, for a transaction percentage. Currently there are 56 DMV Selects across Virginia. With or without REAL ID, it helps shorten the lines at our customer service centers.

DMV is including in the redesign of our operating systems, elements that will facilitate the agency's ability to comply with requirements of REAL ID.

When do I need to get a new license?

As I mentioned earlier, anyone who wants a state-issued driver's license or identification card to enter a federal building or board an airplane will have to produce a REAL ID-compliant license by a certain date, based on your age.

If you are younger than 50 and born after Dec. 1, 1964, the deadline is December 2014. If you're like me and over age 50, the deadline is December 2017.

After the 2014 and 2017 dates, federal agencies will no longer accept a driver's license or ID card unless it is REAL ID compliant. This means you will not be allowed to board commercial flights or enter federal facilities using your current license.

However, Virginians could still present another form of identification, such as a passport, military ID or government identification badge, to board an airplane or access a federal building.

Public information

With so many changes like the centralized issuance process, the new secure cards and, REAL ID requirements, DMV will conduct a comprehensive communications campaign to get the word out to our customers, so they will know what to expect. When customers visit DMV to obtain a REAL ID-compliant license, we want them to be prepared so they can be successful during that first visit.

DMV will publish a complete list of required documents to help citizens applying for a federally-compliant license or ID.

Some examples include a passport, birth certificate or a certificate of citizenship to prove identity and legal presence; a social security card, W-2 or pay stub to prove your social security number; and a utility bill or lease to prove Virginia residency.

DMV wants to make the transition to REAL ID as smooth as possible for Virginians while meeting the challenges of this far-reaching legislation.

Conclusion

At Virginia DMV, our mission is Security, Safety, and Service.

It's a tough balancing act, because often we find the three parts of our mission at odds with each other.

The challenges of REAL ID make that balancing act even more difficult.

But we're going to do what it takes to make it work for the citizens we serve.