

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## **Another Voice: REAL ID reduces risk of identity theft and fraud**

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Jim Harper of the Cato Institute wants Rep. Nita Lowey to put the brakes on New York's REAL ID program, an effort to promote higher driver's license security through best practices and standards. Such a move would undo a decade's worth of work, waste millions of taxpayer dollars and may increase the risk of identity theft and fraud.

The federal REAL ID Act prohibits federal agencies from accepting driver's licenses that do not meet standards designed to prevent identity theft and fraud, and increase the security of the driver's license. Under REAL ID, departments of motor vehicles are required to verify documentation submitted as proof of identity. Department of Motor Vehicles employees handling sensitive personal information undergo background checks. Card stock is kept in a secure location.

The standards aim to make it more difficult for the bad guys to get driver's licenses under different identities. In January, the Department of Homeland Security announced that driver's licenses that do not meet those standards would not be accepted to board airplanes starting in 2020.

In May, the New York State DMV announced its plan to issue a REAL ID driver's license by Jan. 1, 2019. And that's where Harper's arguments go off the rails. He argues that "such a system would negatively affect immigrants, minorities and the working poor. ... Many New Yorkers will have difficulty producing original copies of the large number of documents required by REAL ID, as well as paying for expensive new licenses."

Under New York's plan, the state will continue to offer its traditional license, thereby no more restricting or enabling access to a driver's license. The cost of the REAL ID license will remain the same. Additionally, in the last two years, nearly a dozen states have begun to offer driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants while implementing the REAL ID standards. As far as access and cost are concerned, REAL ID has and will have no effect.

Where REAL ID has had an effect is in curbing fraud. Because of \$2 million in REAL ID funding, the DMV was able to test new technologies designed to detect individuals who have multiple licenses with different identities. That pilot grew into a program that has resulted in the arrest of 3,600 individuals. These crimes are often connected with a catalog of other offenses ranging from driving with a suspended or revoked license to benefits fraud.

REAL ID is good policy. It provides a number of protections against identity theft and fraud, and makes it more difficult for the bad guys to carry out their crimes. Lowey should support REAL ID implementation and build on its continued success.